

“ HE WAS A MAGNIFICENT-LOOKING MAN ”



King Solomon's Mines

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CHAPTER I

I MEET SIR HENRY CURTIS

"EXCUSE me, sir," said the huge man, leaning forward across the captain's table, and speaking in a low deep voice, a very suitable voice, it seemed to me, to come from that great chest. "Excuse me, sir, but is your name Allan Quatermain?"

I said it was.

He made no further remark, but I heard him mutter "lucky!" into his beard.

Presently dinner came to an end, and as we were leaving the saloon he strolled up and asked me if I would come into his cabin to smoke a pipe. I accepted, and he led the way to the *Dunkeld's* deck cabin, and a very good cabin it was. It had been two cabins, but they knocked away the partition and have never put it up again. There was another man, short and dark and wearing an eyeglass, sitting on a sofa in the cabin, with a little table in front of him. The steward brought a bottle of whisky, and the three of us sat down and lit our pipes.

"Now, Mr. Quatermain, I am Sir Henry Curtis and this is Captain John Good, late of Her Majesty's Navy. We were anxious to have a word with you," said Sir Henry. "The year before last about this time you were, I believe, at a place called Bamangwato, to the north of the Transvaal."

"I was," I answered, rather surprised.

"You were trading there, were you not?" put in Captain Good, in his quick way.

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"I was. I took up a waggon-load of goods, made a camp outside the settlement, and stopped till I had sold them."

Sir Henry was sitting opposite to me, his arms leaning on the table. He now looked up, fixing his large grey eyes full upon my face.

"Did you happen to meet a man called Neville there?"

"Oh, yes; he stayed with me for a fortnight to rest his oxen before going on to the interior. I had a letter from a lawyer a few months back, asking me if I knew what had become of him, which I answered to the best of my ability at the time."

"Yes," said Sir Henry, "your letter was forwarded to me. You said in it that the gentleman called Neville left Bamangwato at the beginning of May in a waggon with a driver, a voorlooper, and a Kafir hunter called Jim, announcing his intention of trekking if possible as far as Inyati, where he would sell his waggon and proceed on foot. You also said that he did sell his waggon, for six months afterwards you saw the waggon in the possession of a Portuguese trader. He told you he had bought it at Inyati from a white man whose name he had forgotten, and he believed the white man with the native servant had started off for the interior on a shooting trip."

"Yes."

Then came a pause.

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry suddenly, "I suppose you know or can guess nothing more of the reason of my—of Mr. Neville's journey to the northward, or to what point that journey was directed?"

"I heard something," I answered, and stopped. The subject was one which I did not care to discuss.

I MEET SIR HENRY CURTIS

Sir Henry and Captain Good looked at each other, and Captain Good nodded.

"Mr. Quatermain," went on the former, "I am going to tell you a story, and ask your advice, and perhaps your assistance. Mr. Neville was my brother."

"Oh," I said, starting, for now I knew who Sir Henry had reminded me of when first I saw him. His brother was a much smaller man and had a dark beard, but now that I thought of it, he possessed eyes of the same shade of grey with the same keen look in them: the features, too, were not unlike.

"He was," went on Sir Henry, "my only and younger brother, and till five years ago I do not suppose that we were ever a month away from each other. But just about five years ago we quarrelled bitterly, and I behaved unjustly to him in my anger.

"It so happened that, just at the time when we quarrelled, our father died and was found to have put off making his will until it was too late. The result was that my brother, who had not been brought up to any profession, was not left a penny. At the time the quarrel between us was so bitter that I did not—to my shame I say it" (and he sighed deeply) "offer to do anything for him.

"Well, my brother had a few hundred pounds to his account at the time. Without saying anything to me he drew out this paltry sum, and, having adopted the name of Neville, started off for South Africa in the wild hope of making a fortune. This I learned afterwards. Some three years passed, and I heard nothing of my brother, though I wrote several times.

"Well, Mr. Quatermain, as time went on I became more and more anxious to find out if my brother was alive or dead, and if alive to get him home again. To

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cut a long story short, I made up my mind to come out and look for him myself, and Captain Good was so kind as to come with me."

"Yes," said the captain; "nothing else to do, you see. Turned out by my Lords of the Admiralty to starve on half-pay. And now, perhaps, sir, you will tell us what you know or have heard of the gentleman called Neville."

CHAPTER II

THE LEGEND OF SOLOMON'S MINES

"WHAT was it that you heard about my brother's journey at Bamangwato?" said Sir Henry, as I paused to fill my pipe before answering Captain Good.

"I heard this," I answered, "and I have never mentioned it to a soul till today. I heard that he was starting for Solomon's Mines."

"Solomon's Mines?" ejaculated both my hearers at once. "Where are they?"

"I don't know," I said; "I know where they are said to be. Once I saw the peaks of the mountains that border them, but there were a hundred and thirty miles of desert between me and them, and I am not aware that any white man ever got across it save one. But perhaps the best thing I can do is to tell you the legend of Solomon's Mines as I know it, if you will give your word not to reveal anything I tell you without my permission. Do you agree to that? I have my reasons for asking it."

Sir Henry nodded, and Captain Good replied, "Certainly, certainly."

"Well," I began, "it was an elephant hunter named Evans who first told me the legend of Solomon's Mines, now a matter of nearly thirty years ago. I was telling Evans one night, I remember, of some wonderful workings I had found whilst hunting koodoo and eland in what is now the Lydenburg district of the Transvaal. I see they have come across these workings again lately in prospecting for gold, but I knew of them years ago.

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There is a great wide waggon road cut out of the solid rock, and leading to the mouth of the working or gallery. Inside the mouth of this gallery are stacks of gold quartz piled up ready for roasting, which shows that the workers, whoever they were, left in a hurry. Also, about twenty paces in, the gallery is built across, and a beautiful bit of masonry it is.

“‘Ay,’ said Evans, ‘but I will spin you a queerer yarn than that. Did you ever hear, lad, of the Suliman Mountains up to the north-west of the Mashukulumbwe country?’ I told him I never had. ‘Ah, well,’ he said, ‘that is where Solomon really had his mines, his diamond mines, I mean.’

“‘How do you know that?’ I asked.

“‘Know it! why what is “Suliman” but a corruption of Solomon? And, besides, an old witch doctress up in the Manica country told me all about it. She said that the people who lived across those mountains were a “branch” of the Zulus, speaking a dialect of Zulu, but finer and bigger men even; that there lived among them great wizards, who had learned their art from white men when “all the world was dark”, and who had the secret of a wonderful mine of “bright stones”.’

“Well, I laughed at this story at the time, though it interested me, and for twenty years I never thought any more of the matter. However, just twenty years afterwards I was up beyond the Manica country, at a place called Sitanda’s Kraal. I had an attack of fever, and was in a bad way generally, when one day a Portugee arrived. He was tall and thin, with large dark eyes and curling grey mustachios. We talked together a little, for he could speak broken English, and I understood a little Portugee, and he told me that his name was José Silvestre, and that he had a place near Delagoa Bay.

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When he went on next day with his half-breed companion, he said 'Good-bye', taking off his hat quite in the old style.

" 'Good-bye, señor,' he said; 'if ever we meet again I shall be the richest man in the world, and I will remember you.' I laughed a little—I was too weak to laugh much—and watched him strike out for the great desert to the west, wondering if he was mad, or what he thought he was going to find there.

"A week passed, and I got the better of my fever. One evening I was sitting on the ground in front of my little tent, chewing the last leg of a miserable fowl I had bought from a native, when suddenly I saw a figure, apparently that of a European, for it wore a coat, on the slope of the rising ground opposite to me, about three hundred yards away. The figure crept along on its hands and knees, then it got up and staggered forward a few yards on its legs, only to fall and crawl again. Seeing that it must be somebody in distress, I sent one of my hunters to help him, and presently he arrived, and who do you suppose it turned out to be?"

"José Silvestre, of course," said Captain Good.

"Yes, José Silvestre, or rather his skeleton and a little skin. His face was bright yellow with bilious fever, and his large dark eyes stood nearly out of his head, for all the flesh had gone. There was nothing but yellow parchment-like skin, white hair, and the gaunt bones sticking up beneath.

" 'Water! for the love of God, water!' he moaned, and I saw that his lips were cracked and his tongue, which protruded between them, was swollen and blackish.

"I gave him water with a little milk in it, and he drank it in great gulps, two quarts or so, without

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stopping. I would not let him have any more. Then the fever took him again, and he fell down and began to rave about Suliman's Mountains, and the diamonds, and the desert. I carried him into the tent and did what I could for him, which was little enough; but I saw how it must end. About eleven o'clock he grew quieter, and I lay down for a little rest and went to sleep. At dawn I woke again, and in the half light saw Silvestre sitting up, a strange, gaunt form, and gazing out towards the desert. Presently the first ray of the sun shot right across the wide plain before us till it reached the far-away crest of one of the tallest of the Suliman Mountains more than a hundred miles away.

"'There it is!' cried the dying man in Portuguese, and pointing with his long, thin arm, 'but I shall never reach it, never. No one will ever reach it!'

"Suddenly he paused, and seemed to take a resolution. 'Listen,' he said, turning towards me, 'I am dying.' You have been good to me. I will give you the writing. Perhaps you will get there if you can live to pass the desert, which has killed my poor servant and me.'

"Then he groped in his shirt and brought out what I thought was a Boer tobacco pouch made of the skin of sable antelope. It was fastened with a little strip of hide, and this he tried to loose, but could not. He handed it to me. 'Untie it,' he said. I did so, and extracted a bit of torn yellow linen, on which something was written in rusty letters. Inside this rag was a paper.

"Then he went on feebly, for he was growing weak: 'The paper has all that is on the linen. It took me years to read. Listen: my ancestor wrote that when he was dying on those mountains which no white foot ever pressed before or since. His name was José da Silvestra, and he lived three hundred years ago. His slave, who

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waited for him on this side of the mountains, found him dead, and brought the writing home to Delagoa. It has been in the family ever since, but none have cared to read it, till at last I did. And I have lost my life over it, but another may succeed, and become the richest man in the world—the richest man in the world. Only give it to no one, señor; go yourself!’ Then he began to wander again, and in an hour it was all over.

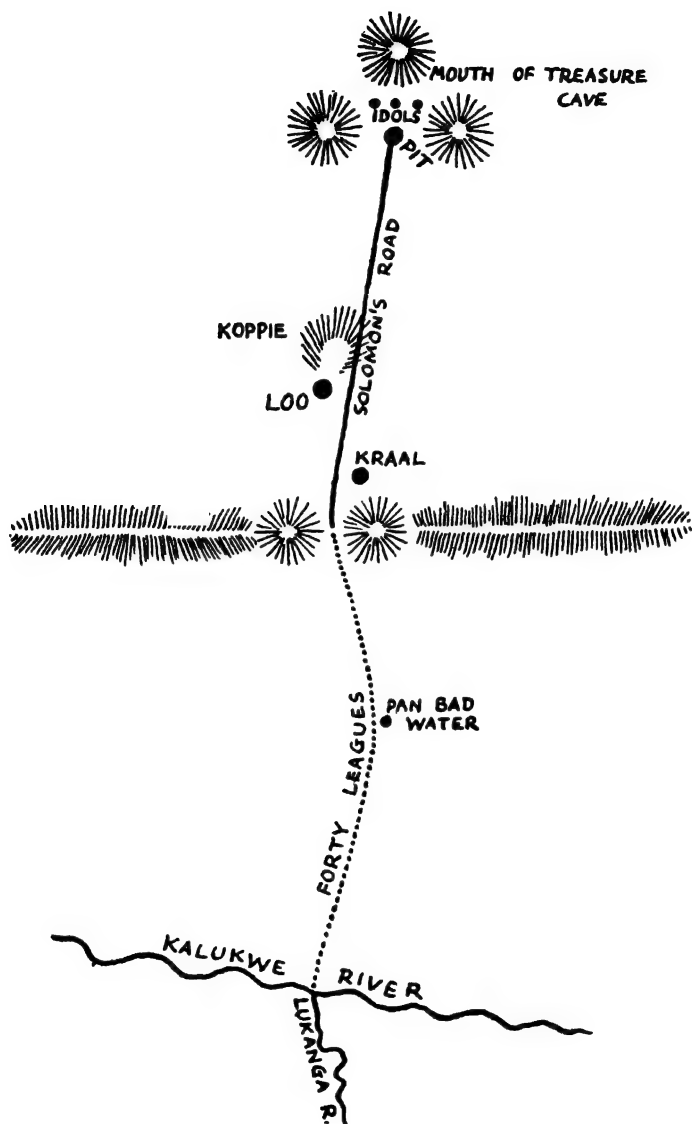
“God rest him! he died very quietly, and I buried him deep, with big boulders on his breast; so I do not think that the jackals can have dug him up. And then I came away.”

“Ay, but the document?” said Sir Henry, in a tone of deep interest.

“Yes, the document; what was in it?” added the captain.

“Well, gentlemen, if you like I will tell you. I have never shown it to anybody yet except to a drunken old Portuguese trader who translated it for me, and had forgotten all about it by the next morning. The original rag is at my home in Durban, together with poor Dom José’s paper, but I have the English translation in my pocket-book, and a copy of the map, if it can be called a map. Here it is.”

“I, José da Silvestra, who am now dying of hunger in the little cave on the southernmost of the two mountains, write this in the year 1590 with a cleft bone upon a remnant of my raiment, my blood being the ink. If my slave should find it when he comes and should bring it to Delagoa, let my friend (name illegible) bring the matter to the knowledge of the king, that he may send an army which, if they live through the desert and the mountains, and can overcome the brave Kukuanes and their devilish arts, to which end many priests should be brought, will make him the richest king since Solomon. With my own eyes have I seen the



SKETCH MAP OF THE ROUTE
TO KING SOLOMON'S MINES

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countless diamonds stored in Solomon's treasure chamber behind the white Death; but through the treachery of Gagool the witch-finder I might bring nought away, scarcely my life. Let him who comes follow the map, till he reaches the great road Solomon made, from whence three days' journey to the King's Palace. Let him kill Gagool. Pray for my soul. Farewell.

JOSÉ DA SILVESTRA." ¹

When I had finished reading the above, and shown the copy of the map, drawn by the dying hand of the old Dom with his blood for ink, there followed a silence of astonishment.

"It's a queer tale, Mr Quatermain," said Sir Henry at last, "I suppose you're not hoaxing us?"

"You shall see the original map and writing when we reach Durban," I answered, somewhat mollified. "But I have not told you about your brother. I knew the man Jim who was with him. He was a Bechuana by birth, a good hunter, and for a native a very clever

¹ Eu José da Silvestra que estou morrendo de fome ná pequena cova onde não ha neve ao lado norte do bico mais ao sul das duas montanhas que chamei seio de Sheba; escrevo isto no anno 1590; escrevo isto com um pedaço d'osso n' um farrapo de minha roupa e com sangue meu por tinta; se o meu escravo dér com isto quando venha ao levar para Lourenzo Marquez, que o meu amigo — leve a cousa ao conhecimento d'El Rei, para que possa mandar um exercito que, se desfiler pelo deserto e pelas montanhas e mesmo sobrepujar os bravos Kukanes e suas artes diabolicas, pelo que se deviam trazer muitos padres Fara o Rei mais rico depois de Salomão. Com meus proprios olhos vé os diamantes sem conto guardados nas camaras do thesouro de Salomão a traz da morte branca, mas pela traição de Gagoal a feiticeira achadora, nada poderia levar, e apenas a minha vida. Quem vier siga o mappa a trepe pela neve de Sheba peito à esquerda até chegar ao bico, do lado norte do qual està a grande estrada do Salomão por elle feita, donde ha tres dias de jornada até ao Palacio do Rei. Mate Gagoal. Reze por minha alma. Adeos.

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man. That morning on which Mr. Neville was starting I saw Jim standing by my waggon and cutting up tobacco on the disselboom.

" 'Jim,' said I, 'where are you off to this trip? Is it elephants?'

" 'No, Baas,' he answered, 'we are after something worth much more than ivory.'

" 'And what might that be?' I said, for I was curious. 'Is it gold?'

" 'No, Baas, something worth more than gold,' and he grinned.

"I asked no more questions, for I did not like to lower my dignity by seeming inquisitive, but I was puzzled. Presently Jim finished cutting his tobacco.

" 'Baas,' said he.

"I took no notice.

" 'Baas,' said he again.

" 'Eh, boy, what is it?' I asked.

" 'Baas, we are going after diamonds.'

" 'Diamonds! why, then, you are steering in the wrong direction; you should head for the Fields.'

" 'Baas, have you ever heard of Suliman's Berg?'—that is, Solomon's Mountains, Sir Henry.

" 'Ay!'

" 'Have you ever heard of the diamonds there?'

" 'I have heard a foolish story, Jim.'

" 'It is no story, Baas. I once knew a woman who came from there, and reached Natal with her child, she told me:—she is dead now.'

" 'Your master will feed the aasvögels'—that is, vultures—'Jim, if he tries to reach Suliman's country, and so will you if they can get any pickings off your worthless old carcass,' said I. 'But is your master really going to Suliman's Berg, Jim, or are you lying?'

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"'No,' he answered, 'he is going. He told me he was bound to make his fortune somehow, or try to; so he might as well have a fling for the diamonds.'

"'Oh!' I said; 'wait a bit, Jim; will you take a note to your master, Jim, and promise not to give it to him till you reach Inyati?' which was some hundred miles off.

"'Yes, Baas.'

"So I took a scrap of paper, and wrote on it, 'Let him who comes . . . climb the left mountain till he reaches the summit, on the north side of which is Solomon's great road.'

"'Now, Jim,' I said, 'when you give this to your master, tell him he had better follow the advice. You are not to give it to him now, because I don't want him back asking me questions which I won't answer. Now be off, you idle fellow, the waggon is nearly out of sight.'

"Jim took the note and went, and that is all I know about your brother, Sir Henry; but I am much afraid——"

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry, "I am going to look for my brother; I am going to trace him to Suli-man's Mountains and over them if necessary, till I find him, or until I know that he is dead. Will you come with me?"

"No, thank you, Sir Henry, I think I had rather not."

"Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry, "I am well off. You may pretty well make your own terms with me; and of course I shall pay all expenses."

"Sir Henry," said I, "this job is the biggest I have come across, and I must take time to think over it. But I will give you my answer before we get to Durban."

CHAPTER III

UMBOPA ENTERS OUR SERVICE

At last, one beautiful evening in January, which is our hottest month, we steamed past the coast of Natal, expecting to make Durban Point by sunset. The three of us went and sat by the wheel, and were quiet for a while.

"Well, Mr. Quatermain," said Sir Henry presently, "have you been thinking about this trip?"

"Yes, gentlemen," I said, on the spur of the moment, "I will go, and by your leave I will tell you why and on what conditions. First for the terms which I ask.

"1. You are to pay all expenses, and any ivory or other treasure we may get is to be divided between Captain Good and myself.

"2. That you pay me £500 for my services on the trip before we start.

"3. That before we trek you sign an agreement to pay my boy Harry a sum of £200 a year for five years, by which time he ought to be able to earn a living for himself.

"That is all, I think, and I daresay you will say quite enough too."

"No," answered Sir Henry, "I accept them gladly. In fact I would pay more than that for your help and advice."

Next day we went ashore, and I put up Sir Henry and Captain Good at the little shanty I have built on the Berea, and which I call my home. There are only three rooms and a kitchen in it, and it is constructed of

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green brick with a galvanized iron roof, but there is a good garden with some nice young mangoes, of which I hope great things. Sir Henry and Good slept in a tent pitched in my little grove of orange trees at the end of the garden, for there was no room for them in the house.

Next day I set about making the necessary preparations. First I pocketed my cheque for £500. Then I bought a waggon and a span of oxen on Sir Henry's behalf. It was what we call a "half-tented" waggon, that is to say, only covered in over the back twelve feet, leaving all the front part free for stores. In this back part were a hide bed, on which two people could sleep, also racks for rifles.

Then I bought a beautiful team of twenty Zulu oxen, Sixteen oxen are the usual number for a team, but I took four extra to allow for casualties. These Zulu cattle are small and light, not more than half the size of Africander oxen, which are generally used for transport purposes; but they will live where the Africanders would starve, besides being quicker and not so liable to become footsore.

Next came the question of provisions and medicines. Fortunately, it turned out that Good is a bit of a doctor. He is not, of course, qualified, but he had a splendid travelling medicine chest and a set of instruments.

There remained two important points, namely, arms and servants. As to the arms I cannot do better than put down a list of those which we finally decided on from among the ample store that Sir Henry had brought with him from England, and those which I owned.

"Three heavy breech-loading elephant guns.

. "Three double-500 Expresses.

"One double No. 12 shot-gun, full choke both barrels.

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"Three Winchester repeating rifles.

"Three single-action Colt revolvers."

Now as to the men who were to go with us. After much consultation we decided that their number should be limited to four, namely, a driver, a leader, and two servants.

The driver and leader I found without much difficulty, two Zulus, named respectively Goza and Tom; but to get the servants proved a more difficult matter. At last I secured one, a Hottentot called Ventvögel or "wind-bird". I had known him before; he was one of the most perfect "spoorers", that is, game trackers, I ever had to do with, and tough as whipcord. He never seemed to tire.

I looked in vain for another man to suit my purpose, so we determined to trust to luck to find a suitable man on our way up country. But on the evening before we left, Ventvögel informed me that a Kafir was waiting to see me. Presently a tall, handsome-looking man, somewhere about thirty years of age, and very light-coloured for a Zulu, entered, and lifting his knob-stick by way of salute, squatted himself down in the corner on his haunches, and sat silent. I did not take any notice of him for a while, for it is a great mistake to do so. If you rush into conversation at once a Zulu is apt to think you a person of little dignity.

"Well," I said at last, "what is your name?"

"Umbopa," answered the man in a slow, deep voice.

"And what is it you want?"

"It is this, 'Macumazahn'." (That is my Kafir name, and means 'the man who gets up in the middle of the night', or in vulgar English 'he who keeps his eyes open'.) "I hear that you go on a great expedition far

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into the North with the white chiefs from over the water. Is it a true word?"

"It is. But what is it to you?"

"It is this, O white men, that if indeed you travel so far I would travel with you."

There was a certain dignity in the man's speech, and especially in his use of the words "O white men", instead of "O Inkosis" (chiefs) which struck me.

"You forget yourself a little," I said. "Your words run out unawares. That is not the way to speak. Where is your kraal?"

"I am of the Zulu people, yet not of them. The house of my tribe is in the far North. I came from the North as a child to Zululand. Afterwards I ran away from Zululand and came to Natal because I wanted to see the white man's ways. Now I am tired, and would go North again. I want no money, but I am a brave man, and am worth my place and meat. I have spoken."

I was rather puzzled by this man and his way of speech. Somehow he was different from the ordinary run of Zulus, and I rather mistrusted his offer to come without pay. So I translated his words to Sir Henry and Good, and asked them their opinion.

Sir Henry told me to ask him to stand up, while Good screwed his eyeglass more firmly into his eye. Umbopa rose to his feet, at the same time slipping off the long military great-coat which he wore, and revealing himself naked except for the *moocha* round his centre and a necklace of lions' claws. Certainly he was a magnificent-looking man. Standing about six foot three high he was broad in proportion, and very shapely. In that light, too, his skin looked scarcely more than dark, except here and there where deep black scars marked old

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assegai wounds. Sir Henry walked up to him and looked into his proud, handsome face.

"I like your looks, Mr. Umbopa, and we will take you as our servant," said Sir Henry in English.

Umbopa evidently understood him, for he answered in Zulu, "It is well": and then added, with a glance at Sir Henry's great stature and breadth, "We are men, thou and I."

CHAPTER IV

OUR MARCH INTO THE DESERT

WE left Durban at the end of January, and it was not until the second week of May that we camped near Sitanda's Kraal. Just below our encampment flowed a little stream, on the farther side of which is the stony slope down which, twenty years before, I had seen poor Silvestre creeping back after his attempt to reach Solomon's Mines. Beyond that slope begins the waterless desert, covered with a species of karoo shrub.

It was evening when we pitched our camp, and the sun was setting into the desert. Leaving Good in charge, I took Sir Henry with me, and walking to the top of the slope opposite, we gazed across the desert. The air was very clear, and far, far away I could distinguish the faint blue outlines, here and there capped with white, of the Suliman Berg.

"There," I said, "there is the wall round Solomon's Mines, but God knows if we shall ever climb it."

"My brother should be there, and if he is, I shall reach him somehow," said Sir Henry, in that tone of quiet confidence which marked the man.

"I hope so," I answered, and turned to go back to the camp, when I saw that we were not alone. Behind us, also gazing earnestly towards the far-off mountains, stood the great Kafir Umbopa.

The Zulu spoke when he saw that I had observed him, addressing Sir Henry.

"Is it to that land that thou wouldst journey,

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Incubu?" (a native word meaning, I believe, an elephant, and the name given to Sir Henry by the Kafirs).

I asked him sharply what he meant by addressing his master in that familiar way. The Zulu laughed a quiet little laugh which angered me.

"How dost thou know that I am not the equal of the Inkosi whom I serve?" he said. "He is of a royal house, no doubt; one can see it in his size and by his bearing; so, perhaps, am I. At least I am as great a man. Be my mouth, O Macumazahn, and say my words to the Inkoos Incubu, for I would speak to him and to thee, and yeshall speak also to Bougwan." (They called Good "Bougwan" or *Glass Eye*, because of his eye-glass.)

I was angry with the man, but somehow he impressed me. So I translated.

"Yes, Umbopa," answered Sir Henry, "I would journey there."

"The desert is wide and there is no water in it, the mountains are high and covered with snow, and man cannot say what lies beyond them behind the place where the sun sets; how shalt thou come thither, Incubu, and wherefore dost thou go?"

I translated again.

"Tell him," answered Sir Henry, "that I go because I believe that a man of my blood, my brother, has gone there before me, and I journey to seek him."

Umbopa understood English, though he rarely spoke it.

"It seems to me that we are much alike, Incubu," he put in. "Perhaps I too seek a brother over the mountains."

I looked at him suspiciously. "What dost thou mean?" I asked; "what dost thou know of those mountains?"

"A little; a very little. There is a strange land yonder,

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a land of witchcraft and beautiful things; a land of brave people, and of trees, and streams, and snow peaks, and a great white road. I have heard of it. But what is the good of talking? It grows dark. Those who live to see will see."

Again I looked at him doubtfully. The man knew too much.

"You need not fear me, Macumazahn," he said, interpreting my look. "I dig no holes for you to fall in. I make no plots. If ever we cross those mountains behind the sun I will tell what I know. But Death sits upon them. Be wise and turn back. Go and hunt elephants, my masters. I have spoken."

And without another word he lifted his spear in salutation, and returned towards the camp, where shortly afterwards we found him cleaning a gun like any other Kafir.

"That is an odd man," said Sir Henry.

"Yes," answered I, "too odd by half. I don't like his little ways."

Next day we made our arrangements for starting. Of course it was impossible to drag our heavy elephant rifles and other kit with us across the desert, so dismissing our bearers we made an arrangement with an old native who had a kraal close by to take care of them till we returned.

Then we arranged the kit we five—Sir Henry, Good, myself, Umbopa, and the Hottentot Ventvögel—were to take with us on our journey. It was small enough, but do what we would we could not get its weight down under about forty pounds a man. This is what it consisted of:

The three express rifles and two hundred rounds of ammunition

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The two Winchester repeating rifles (for Umbopa and Ventvögel), with two hundred rounds of cartridge

Three "Colt" revolvers and sixty rounds of cartridge

Five Cochrane's water-bottles, each holding four pints

Five blankets

Twenty-five pounds' weight of biltong—*i.e.* sun-dried game-flesh

Ten pounds' weight of best mixed beads for gifts

A selection of medicine, including an ounce of quinine, and one or two small surgical instruments

Our knives, a few sundries, such as a compass, matches, a pocket filter, tobacco, a trowel, a bottle of brandy, and the clothes we stood in.

This was our total equipment, a small one indeed for such a venture, but we dared not attempt to carry more.

With great difficulty, and by the promise of a present of a good hunting-knife each, I succeeded in persuading three wretched natives from the village to come with us for the first stage, twenty miles, and to carry a large gourd holding a gallon of water apiece. My object was to enable us to refill our water-bottles after the first night's march, for we determined to start in the cool of the evening.

All next day we rested and slept, and at sunset ate a hearty meal of fresh beef washed down with tea, the last, as Good sadly remarked, we were likely to drink for many a long day. Then, having made our final preparations, we lay down and waited for the moon to rise. At last about nine o'clock up she came in all her glory. We rose and in a few minutes were ready, and yet we hesitated a little. We three white men stood by ourselves. Umbopa, assegai in hand and a rifle across his shoulders, looked out fixedly across the desert a few



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paces ahead of us; while the hired natives, with the gourds of water, and Ventvögel, were gathered in a little knot behind.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Henry presently, in his deep voice, "we are going on about as strange a journey as men can make in this world. It is very doubtful if we can succeed in it. But we are three men who will stand together for good or for evil to the last."

For the space of a minute or so, he paused in silence.

"And now," he said, "*trek!*"

So we started.

We had nothing to guide ourselves by except the distant mountains and old José da Silvestra's chart. If we failed in finding that pool of bad water which the old Dom marked in the middle of the desert, about sixty miles from our starting-point, and as far from the mountains, we must perish miserably of thirst. Even supposing that da Silvestra had marked the pool right, what was there to prevent its having been dried up by the sun generations ago, or trampled in by game, or filled with the drifting sand?

On we tramped silently as shades through the night and in the heavy sand. The karoo bushes caught our feet and retarded us, and the sand worked into our veldtschoons and Good's shooting boots, so that every few miles we had to stop and empty them; but still the night kept fairly cool, though the atmosphere was thick and heavy, giving a sort of creamy feel to the air, and we made fair progress.

About three o'clock we called a halt, and having drunk a little water, not much, for water was precious, and rested for half an hour, we started again.

On, on we went, till at last it was day.

Still we did not halt, though by this time we should

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have been glad enough to do so, for we knew that when once the sun was fully up it would be almost impossible for us to travel. At length, about an hour later, we spied a little pile of boulders rising out of the plain, and to this we dragged ourselves. As luck would have it, here we found an overhanging slab of rock carpeted beneath with smooth sand, which gave shelter from the heat. Underneath this we crept, and each one of us having drunk some water and eaten a bit of biltong, we lay down and soon were sound asleep.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before we woke, to find our bearers preparing to return. They had seen enough of the desert already, and no number of knives would have tempted them to come a step farther. So we took a hearty drink, and having emptied our water-bottles, filled them up again from the gourds that they had brought with them, and then watched them depart on their twenty miles' tramp home.

At half-past four we also started. It was lonely and desolate work, for, with the exception of a few ostriches, there was not a single living creature to be seen on all the vast sandy plain.

At sunset we halted, waiting for the moon to rise. At last she came up, beautiful as ever, and, with one halt about two o'clock in the morning, we trudged on wearily through the night, till at last the welcome sun put an end to our labour. We drank a little and flung ourselves down on the sand, thoroughly tired out, and soon were all asleep. This time we were not so lucky as to find a sheltering rock to guard us from the glare of the sun, with the result that about seven o'clock we woke up to find ourselves literally being baked through and through. The burning sun seemed to be sucking our very blood out of us. We sat up and gasped.

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"Phew," said I, grabbing at the halo of flies, which buzzed cheerfully round my head. The heat did not affect *them*.

"My word!" said Sir Henry.

"It is hot!" echoed Good.

It was hot indeed, and there was not a bit of shelter to be found. Look where we would there was no rock or tree, nothing but an unending glare, rendered dazzling by the heated air that danced over the surface of the desert as it dances over a red-hot stove.

"What is to be done?" asked Sir Henry; "we can't stand this for long."

We looked at each other blankly.

"I have it," said Good, "we must dig a hole, get in it, and cover ourselves with the karoo bushes."

It did not seem a very promising suggestion, but at least it was better than nothing, so we set to work, and with the trowel we had brought with us and the help of our hands in about an hour we succeeded in digging out a patch of ground some ten feet long by twelve feet wide to the depth of two feet. Then we cut a quantity of low scrub with our hunting-knives, and creeping into the hole, pulled it over us all, with the exception of Ventvögel, on whom, being a Hottentot, the heat had no particular effect. This gave us some slight shelter from the burning rays of the sun.

Somehow that miserable day wore on towards evening. About three o'clock in the afternoon we determined that we could bear it no longer. It would be better to die walking than to be killed slowly by heat and thirst in this dreadful hole. So taking each of us a little drink from our fast-diminishing supply of water, now warmed to about the same temperature as a man's blood, we staggered forward.

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We had then covered some fifty miles of wilderness. If the reader will refer to the rough copy of da Silvestra's map, he will see that the desert is marked as measuring forty leagues across, and the "pan bad water" is set down as being about in the middle of it. Now forty leagues is one hundred and twenty miles, consequently we ought at the most to be within twelve or fifteen miles of the water if any should really exist.

Through the afternoon we crept slowly and painfully along, scarcely doing more than a mile and a half an hour. At sunset we rested again, waiting for the moon, and after drinking a little managed to get some sleep.

Before we lay down, Umbopa pointed out to us a slight hillock on the flat surface of the plain about eight miles away. At the distance it looked like an ant-hill, and as I was dropping off to sleep I fell to wondering what it could be.

With the moon we marched again, feeling dreadfully exhausted. We walked no longer, we staggered, now and again falling from exhaustion, and being obliged to call a halt every hour or so. We had scarcely energy left in us to speak.

At last, about two o'clock, utterly worn out in body and mind, we came to the foot of the queer hill, which at first sight resembled a gigantic ant-heap about a hundred feet high, and covering nearly two acres of ground.

Here we halted, and driven to it by our desperate thirst, sucked down our last drops of water. We had but half a pint a head, and each of us could have drunk a gallon.

Then we lay down. Just as I was dropping off to sleep I heard Umbopa remark to himself in Zulu—

"If we cannot find water we shall all be dead before the moon rises tomorrow."

CHAPTER V

WATER! WATER!

IN two hours' time, that is, about four o'clock, we woke up and began to discuss the situation, which was serious enough. Not a drop of water was left. We turned the water-bottles upside down, and licked the tops, but it was a failure, they were dry as a bone.

It was gradually growing light, and as we sat staring blankly at each other, I observed the Hottentot Ventvögel lifting his snub nose, and sniffing the hot air for all the world like an old ram who scents danger. Presently he spoke.

"I *smell* water," he said.

We felt quite jubilant, for we knew what a wonderful instinct these wild-bred men possess.

Just at that moment the sun came up gloriously and revealed so grand a sight to our astonished eyes that for a moment or two we even forgot our thirst.

For there, not more than forty or fifty miles from us, glittering like silver in the early rays of the morning sun, stretched for hundreds of miles the great Suliman Berg. Straight before us, rose two enormous mountains, measuring each of them at least fifteen thousand feet in height, standing not more than a dozen miles apart, linked together by a precipitous cliff of rock, and towering straight into the sky. The stretch of cliff that connects them appears to be some thousand feet in height, and on each side of them, so far as the eye can reach, extend similar lines of cliff, broken only here and there by flat-topped mountains.

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After the first shock of amazement at this fantastic sight, our thirst once more forced itself on our minds.

It was all very well for Ventvögel to say that he smelt water, but we could see no signs of it. So far as the eye might reach there was nothing but sweltering sand and karoo scrub. We walked round the hillock and gazed about anxiously on the other side, but it was the same story, not a drop of water could be seen.

"You are a fool," I said angrily to Ventvögel; "there is no water."

But still he lifted his ugly snub nose and sniffed.

"I smell it, Baas," he answered; "it is somewhere in the air."

Sir Henry stroked his yellow beard thoughtfully. "Perhaps it is on the top of the hill," he suggested.

"Rot," said Good; "whoever heard of water being found at the top of a hill!"

"Let us go and look," I put in, and hopelessly enough we scrambled up the sandy sides of the hillock, Umbopa leading. Presently he stopped dead in his tracks.

"*Nanzia manzie!*" that is, "Here is water," he cried with a loud voice.

We rushed up to him, and there, sure enough, in a deep hollow on the very top was a pool of water. How it came to be in such a strange place we did not stop to inquire, nor did we hesitate at its black and unpleasant appearance. It was water, or a good imitation of it, and that was enough for us. We gave a bound and a rush, and in another second we were all down on our stomachs sucking it up. Heavens, how we did drink! Then when we had done drinking we tore off our clothes and sat down in the pool, absorbing the moisture through our parched skins.

After a while we rose from it, refreshed indeed, and

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fell to on our biltong, of which we had scarcely been able to touch a mouthful for twenty-four hours, and ate our fill. Then we smoked a pipe, and lay down by the side of that blessed pool, under the overhanging shadow of its bank, and slept till midday.

All that day we rested there by the water, thanking our stars that we had been lucky enough to find it, bad as it was, and not forgetting thanks to the shade of da Silvestra.

Having filled both ourselves and our water-bottles as full as possible, in far better spirits we started off again with the moon. That night we covered nearly five-and-twenty miles, but, needless to say, found no more water, though we were lucky enough on the following day to get a little shade behind some ant-heaps. When the sun rose, and, for a while, cleared away the mists, Suliman's Berg, now only about twenty miles off, seemed to be towering right above us. At the approach of evening we marched again, and by daylight next morning found ourselves upon the lowest slopes of the left-hand of the two great mountains, for which we had been steadily steering. By this time our water was exhausted once more, and we were suffering severely from thirst, nor indeed could we see any chance of relieving it till we reached the snow-line far above us. After resting an hour or two, we went on toiling painfully up the lava slopes.

By eleven o'clock we were utterly exhausted, and in a very bad state indeed. A few hundred yards above us were some large lumps of lava, and towards these we steered with the intention of lying down beneath their shade. We reached them, and to our surprise, we saw that the clinker here was covered with a dense green growth. We did not take much interest but sat down

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under the rocks and groaned. As we were sitting there I saw Umbopa get up and hobble towards the patch of green, and a few minutes afterwards, to my great astonishment, I perceived him dancing and shouting like a maniac, waving something green as he did so. Off we all scrambled towards him as fast as our wearied limbs would carry us, hoping that he had found water.

"What is it, Umbopa, son of a fool?" I shouted in Zulu.

"It is food and water, Macumazahn," and again he waved the green thing.

Then I saw what he had found. It was a melon. We had hit upon a patch of wild melons, thousands of them, and dead ripe.

"Melons!" I yelled to Good, who was next me; and in another second his false teeth were fixed in one of them.

I think we ate about six each before we had done, and poor fruit as they were, I doubt if I ever thought anything nicer.

But melons are not very nutritious, and when we had satisfied our thirst we began to feel exceedingly hungry. We had still some biltong left, but our stomachs turned from biltong, and besides we were obliged to be very sparing of it, for we could not say when we should find more food. Just at this moment a lucky thing chanced. Looking across the desert I saw a flock of about ten large birds flying straight towards us.

"*Skit, Baas, skit!*" ("Shoot, master, shoot!") whispered the Hottentot, throwing himself on his face, as we all did.

Then I saw that the birds were a flock of bustards, and that they would pass within fifty yards of my head. Taking one of the Winchesters I waited till they were

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nearly over us, and then jumped to my feet. On seeing me the birds bunched up together, and I fired two shots straight into the thick of them, and, as luck would have it, brought one down, a fine fellow, that weighed about twenty pounds. In half an hour we had a fire made of dry melon stalks, and he was toasting over it, and we made such a feed as we had not tasted for a week.

That night we went on again with the moon, carrying as many melons as we could with us. As we ascended we found the air grow cooler and cooler, and at dawn we were not more than about a dozen miles from the snow-line. Here we found more melons, and so had no longer any anxiety about water, for we knew that we should soon get plenty of snow. But the ascent had now become very steep, and we made but slow progress, not more than a mile an hour. Also that night we ate our last morsel of biltong.

We began to grow very anxious about food. We had escaped death by thirst, but it seemed probable that it was only to die of hunger. The events of the next three miserable days are best described by copying the entries made at the time in my note-book.

“21st May.—Started 11 a.m., finding the atmosphere quite cold enough to travel by day, and carrying some water-melons with us. Struggled all day, but found no more melons, having evidently passed out of their district. Saw no game of any sort. Halted for the night at sundown, having had no food for many hours. Suffered much during the night from cold.

“22nd.—Started at sunrise again, feeling very faint and weak. Only made about five miles all day; found some patches of snow, of which we ate, but nothing else. Camped at night under the edge of a great plateau. Cold bitter. Drank a little brandy each, and

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huddled ourselves together, each wrapped up in his blanket to keep ourselves alive. Are now suffering frightfully from starvation and weariness. Thought that Ventvögel would have died during the night.

"23rd.—Struggled forward once more as soon as the sun was well up, and had thawed our limbs a little. We are now in a dreadful plight, and I fear that unless we get food this will be our last day's journey. Little brandy left. Good, Sir Henry, and Umbopa bear up wonderfully, but Ventvögel is in a very bad way. Like most Hottentots, he cannot stand cold. Pangs of hunger not so bad, but have a sort of numb feeling about the stomach. Others say the same. Not a living thing is to be seen. God help us, I fear that our time is come."

And now I will drop the journal, because what follows requires telling rather more fully.

All that day—the 23rd May—we struggled slowly up the incline of snow, lying down from time to time to rest. We did not accomplish more than seven miles that day. Just before sunset we found ourselves exactly under the mountain peak, which towered thousands of feet into the air, a vast smooth hillock of frozen snow.

"I say," gasped Good, presently, "we ought to be somewhere near that cave the old gentleman wrote about."

"Yes," said I, "if there is a cave."

"Come, Quatermain," groaned Sir Henry, "don't talk like that; I have every faith in the Dom; remember the water! We shall find the place soon."

"If we don't find it before dark we are dead men," was my consoling reply.

For the next ten minutes we trudged in silence, when suddenly Umbopa, who was marching along beside me, wrapped in his blanket, and with a leather belt

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strapped tightly round his stomach, to "make his hunger small," as he said, caught me by the arm.

"Look!" he said, pointing towards the slope.

I followed his glance, and some two hundred yards from us saw what appeared to be a hole in the snow.

"It is the cave," said Umbopa.

We made our way to the spot, and found sure enough that the hole was the mouth of a cave, no doubt the same as that of which da Silvestra wrote. We were not too soon, for just as we reached shelter the sun went down with startling rapidity, leaving the world nearly dark. So we crept into the cave, which did not appear to be very big, and huddling ourselves together for warmth, swallowed what remained of our brandy—barely a mouthful each—and tried to forget our miseries in sleep. But the cold was too intense to allow us to do so. There we sat hour after hour through the still and bitter night, feeling the frost wander round and nip us now in the finger, now in the foot, now in the face. In vain did we huddle closer and closer; there was no warmth in our miserable starved carcasses.

Not very long before dawn I heard the Hottentot Ventvögel, whose teeth had been chattering all night like castanets, give a deep sigh. Then his teeth stopped chattering. I did not think anything of it at the time, concluding that he had gone to sleep. His back was resting against mine, and it seemed to grow colder and colder, till at last it felt like ice.

Gradually the air began to grow grey with light, then at last the sun peeped above the lava wall and looked in upon our half-frozen forms, and also upon Ventvögel, sitting there amongst us *stone dead*. No wonder his back felt cold, poor fellow. He had died when I heard him sigh, and was now frozen almost stiff. We

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dragged ourselves from the corpse and left it sitting there, its arms clasped about its knees.

By this time the sunlight was pouring its cold rays, for here they were cold, straight into the mouth of the cave. Suddenly I heard an exclamation of fear from someone, and turned my head.

And this was what I saw. Sitting at the end of the cavern—it was not more than twenty feet long—was another form, of which the head rested on its chest and the long arms hung down. I stared at it, and saw that this too was a *dead man*, and, what was more, a white man.

The others saw also, and the sight proved too much for our nerves. One and all we scrambled out of the cave as fast as our half-frozen limbs would allow.

CHAPTER VI

SOLOMON'S ROAD

OUTSIDE the cavern we halted, feeling rather foolish.

“I am going back,” said Sir Henry.

“Why?” asked Good.

“Because it has struck me that—what we saw—may be my brother.”

This was a new idea, and we went in again. After the bright light outside, our eyes, weak with staring at the snow, could not pierce the gloom of the cave for a while. Presently, however, they grew used to the semi-darkness, and we advanced towards the dead man.

Sir Henry knelt down and peered into his face.

“Thank God,” he said, with a sigh of relief, “it is *not* my brother.”

Then I drew near and looked. The body was that of a tall man in middle life with aquiline features, grizzled hair, and a long black moustache. The skin was perfectly yellow, and stretched tightly over the bones. Its clothing, with the exception of what seemed to be the remains of a pair of woollen hose, had been removed, leaving the skeleton-like frame naked. Round the neck of the corpse, which was frozen perfectly stiff, hung a yellow ivory crucifix.

“Who on earth can it be?” said I.

“Can’t you guess?” asked Good.

•I shook my head.

“Why, the old Dom, José da Silvestra, of course—who else?”

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"Impossible," I gasped, "he died three hundred years ago."

"And what is there to prevent him lasting for three thousand years in this atmosphere, I should like to know?" asked Good. "The sun never gets in here; no animal comes here to tear or destroy. No doubt his slave, of whom he speaks on the writing, took off his clothes and left him. He could not have buried him alone. Look!" he went on, stooping down to pick up a queerly-shaped bone scraped at the end into a sharp point, "here is the 'cleft bone' that Silvestra used to draw the map with."

"Ay," said Sir Henry, "and this is where he got his ink from," and he pointed to a small wound on the dead Dom's left arm. "Did ever man see such a thing before!"

There was no longer any doubt about the matter. There he sat, the dead man, whose directions, written some ten generations ago, had led us to this spot. Here in my own hand was the rude pen with which he had written them, and about his neck hung the crucifix that his dying lips had kissed.

"Let us go," said Sir Henry in a low voice; "stay, we will give him a companion," and lifting up the dead body of the Hottentot Ventvögel, he placed it near to that of the old Dom. I merely took the bone pen, and it is before me as I write—sometimes I sign my name with it.

So we crept out of the cave into the welcome sunshine and resumed our path, wondering in our hearts how many hours it would be before we were even as they are.

When we had walked about half a mile we came to the edge of the plateau. What lay before us we could not see, for the landscape was wreathed in billows of

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morning fog. Presently, however, the higher layers of mist cleared a little, and revealed, at the end of a long slope of snow, a patch of green grass, some five hundred yards beneath us, through which a stream was running. Nor was this all. By the stream, basking in the bright sun, stood and lay a group of from ten to fifteen *large antelopes*.

The sight filled us with joy. There was food in plenty if only we could get it. But the question was how to get it. The beasts were fully six hundred yards off, a very long shot, and one not to be depended on when our lives hung on the result.

We knew it was useless trying to stalk the game. To begin with, the wind was not favourable, and we must certainly be seen against the background of snow.

"Well, we must have a try from where we are," said Sir Henry.

"Let each of us take the buck opposite to him. Aim well at the point in his shoulder and high up," said I; "and Umbopa, do you give the word, so that we may all fire together."

Then came a pause, each of us aiming his level best, as indeed a man is likely to do when he knows that life itself depends upon the shot.

"Fire!" said Umbopa in Zulu, and at almost the same instant the three rifles rang out loudly; three clouds of smoke hung for a moment before us, and a hundred echoes went flying over the silent snow. Presently the smoke cleared, and revealed a great buck lying on its back and kicking furiously in its death agony. We gave a yell of triumph—we were saved—we should not starve. Weak as we were, we rushed down the intervening slope of snow, and in ten minutes from the time of shooting, that animal's heart and liver

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were lying before us. But now a new difficulty arose—we had no fuel, and therefore could make no fire to cook them. We gazed at each other in dismay.

“Starving men should not be fanciful,” said Good; “we must eat raw meat.”

So we took the heart and liver and buried them for a few minutes in a patch of snow to cool them. Then we washed them in the ice-cold water of the stream, and lastly ate them greedily. It sounds horrible enough, but honestly, I never tasted anything so good as that raw meat. In a quarter of an hour we were changed men. Our life and vigour came back to us, our feeble pulses grew strong again, and the blood went coursing through our veins.

We had been so busy satisfying our starving stomachs that we had not found time to look about us. But now, having set Umbopa to cut off as much of the best meat as we were likely to be able to carry, we began to inspect our surroundings. The mist had cleared away, for it was eight o'clock, and the sun had sucked it up, so we were able to take in all the country before us at a glance.

Behind and over us towered the mountain peaks, and below, some five thousand feet beneath where we stood, lay league on league of the most lovely country. Here were dense patches of lofty forest, there a great river wound its way. To the left stretched a vast expanse of rich grass land, on which we could just make out countless herds of game or cattle; at that distance we could not tell which. This expanse appeared to be ringed in by a wall of distant mountains. To the right the country was more or less mountainous; that is, solitary hills stood up from its level, with stretches of cultivated land between, amongst which we could see groups of dome-shaped huts. The landscape lay before us as a map, and

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for a while we sat down and gazed in silence. Presently Sir Henry spoke.

"Isn't there something on the map about Solomon's Great Road?" he said.

I nodded, my eyes still gazing out over the far country.

"Well, look; there it is!" and he pointed a little to our right.

There, winding away towards the plain, was what appeared to be a wide turnpike road. We had not seen it at first because, on reaching the plain, it turned behind some broken country. We did not say anything, at least not much. Somehow it did not seem particularly unnatural that we should find a sort of Roman road in this strange land. We accepted the fact, that was all.

"Well," said Good, "it must be quite near us if we cut off to the right. Hadn't we better be making a start?"

This was sound advice, and as soon as we had washed our faces and hands in the stream we acted on it. For a mile or more we made our way over boulders and across patches of snow, till suddenly, on reaching the top of the little rise, we found the road at our feet. It was a splendid road cut out of the solid rock, at least fifty feet wide, and apparently well kept; but the odd thing about it was that it seemed to begin there.

It proved a very different business travelling along down hill with full stomachs to what it was travelling uphill over the snow quite starved and almost frozen. Every mile we walked the atmosphere grew softer and the country before us more beautiful. As for the road itself, I never saw such an engineering work, though Sir Henry said that the great road over the St. Gothard in Switzerland is very like it. At one place we came to a ravine three hundred feet broad and at least a hundred

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deep. This was actually filled in with huge blocks of stone, having arches pierced through them at the bottom for a waterway, over which the road went. At another place it was cut in zigzags out of the side of a precipice five hundred feet deep, and in a third it tun-nelled through the base of a ridge, a distance of thirty yards or more.

By midday we had advanced sufficiently down the mountain to reach the region where wood was to be met with. First we came to scattered bushes which grew more and more frequent, till at last we found the road winding through a vast grove of silver trees.

"Ah!" said Good, looking at these shining-leaved trees with enthusiasm, "here is lots of wood, let us stop and cook some dinner; I have about digested that raw liver."

Nobody objected to this, so leaving the road we made our way to a stream which was not far off, and soon had a fire of dry boughs blazing. Cutting off some hunks from the flesh of the antelope which we had brought with us, we toasted them on the end of sharp sticks, as one sees the Kafirs do, and ate them with relish. After filling ourselves, we lay back and lit our pipes.

Presently I missed Good, and I looked to see what had become of him. Soon I observed him sitting by the bank of the stream, in which he had been bathing. He had nothing on but his flannel shirt. He had washed his collar, had thoroughly shaken out his trousers, coat, and waistcoat, and was now folding them up neatly till he was ready to put them on. Then he took his boots, scrubbed them with a handful of fern, and finally rubbed them over with a piece of fat, which he had carefully saved, till they looked fairly respectable. Having inspected the boots through his eye-glass, he put

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them on. Next he combed his hair and then felt his chin, on which a ten days' beard was flourishing.

"Surely," thought I, "he is not going to try to shave."

But it was so. Taking the piece of fat with which he had greased his boots, Good washed it thoroughly in the stream. Then he brought out a little pocket razor, scrubbed his face and chin vigorously with the fat, and began. But it proved a painful process, for he groaned very much over it. At last he succeeded in getting the worst of the hair off the right side of his face and chin, when suddenly I became aware of a flash of light that passed by his head.

Good sprang up, and so did I, and this was what I saw. Standing not more than twenty paces from where I was, and ten from Good, were a group of men. They were very tall and copper-coloured, and some of them wore great plumes of black feathers and short cloaks of leopard skins; this was all I noticed at the moment. In front of them stood a youth of about seventeen, his hand still raised. Evidently the flash of light had been caused by a knife and he had hurled it.

As I looked, an older man stepped forward out of the group, and catching the youth by the arm said something to him. Then they advanced upon us.

Sir Henry, Good, and Umbopa by this time had seized their rifles. The party of natives still came on. It struck me that they could not know what rifles were.

"Put down your guns!" I shouted to the others, seeing where our only chance of safety lay. They obeyed, and walking to the front I addressed the elderly man.

"Greeting," I said in Zulu, not knowing what language to use. To my surprise I was understood.

"Greeting," answered the man, not, indeed, in the same tongue, but in a dialect very close to it.



'SUDDENLY I BECAME AWARE OF A FLASH OF LIGHT'

SOLOMON'S ROAD

"Whence come you?" he went on, "who are you? and why are the faces of three of you white, and the face of the fourth as the face of our mother's sons?" and he pointed to Umbopa. I looked at Umbopa as he said it, and it flashed across me that he was right. But I had not time to reflect on this odd chance.

"We are strangers, and come in peace," I answered, speaking very slowly, so that he might understand me, "and this man is our servant."

"Ye lie," he answered; "no strangers can cross the mountains where all things perish. But what do your lies matter? If ye are strangers then ye must die, for no strangers may live in the land of the Kukuanas. It is the king's law. Prepare then to die, O strangers!"

"What does that beggar say?" asked Good.

"He says we are going to be killed," I answered grimly.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Good; and, in the way he had when worried, he put his hand to his false teeth, dragging the top set down and allowing them to fly back to his jaw with a snap. It was a lucky move, for next second the Kukuanas uttered a yell of horror, and bolted back some yards.

"What's up?" said I.

"It's his teeth," whispered Sir Henry excitedly. "He moved them. Take them out, Good, take them out!"

He obeyed, slipping the set into the sleeve of his flannel shirt.

In another second the men again advanced slowly. Apparently they had now forgotten about killing us.

• "How is it, O strangers," asked the old man solemnly, "that this fat man" (pointing to Good) "whose body is clothed, and whose legs are bare, who grows hair on one

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side of his sickly face and not on the other, and who wears one shining and transparent eye, has teeth that move of themselves?"

"Open your mouth," I said to Good, who promptly grinned at the old gentleman like an angry dog, revealing two thin red lines of gum. The audience gasped.

"Where are his teeth?" they shouted; "with our eyes we saw them."

Turning his head slowly, Good swept his hand across his mouth. Then he grinned again, and lo, there were two rows of lovely teeth.

Now the young man who had flung the knife threw himself down on the grass and gave a howl of terror; and as for the old gentleman, his knees knocked together with fear.

"I see ye are spirits," he said, "did ever man born of woman have hair on one side of his face and not on the other, or a round and transparent eye, or teeth which moved and melted away and grew again? Pardon us, O my lords."

Here was luck indeed, and, needless to say, I jumped at the chance.

"It is granted," I said with a smile. "Ye shall know the truth. We come from another world, though we are men such as ye; we come," I went on, "from the biggest star that shines at night."

"Oh! oh!" groaned the chorus.

"Yes," I went on, "we come to stay with you a little while, and to bless you. Ye will see, O friends, that I have prepared myself by learning your language."

"It is so, it is so," said the chorus.

"Now, friends," I continued, "ye might think that we should wish to kill the one among you who threw the knife."

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"Spare him, my lords," cried the old man; "he is the king's son, and I am his uncle."

"Ye may perhaps doubt our power to avenge," I went on. "I will show you. Here, thou dog and slave" (addressing Umbopa in a savage tone), "give me the magic tube that speaks"; and I tipped a wink towards my express rifle.

Umbopa rose to the occasion and handed me the gun.

"It is here, O Lord of Lords," he said with a deep bow.

Now just before I had asked for the rifle I had seen a little antelope standing on a rock about seventy yards away, and had determined to risk a shot at it.

"Ye see that buck," I said, pointing the animal out to the party before me. "Tell me, is it possible for a man to kill it from here with a noise?"

"It is not possible, my lord," answered the old man.

"Yet shall I kill it," I said quietly.

The old man smiled. "That my lord cannot do," he answered.

I raised the rifle and covered the buck. It was a small animal, and one which a man might well be excused for missing, but I knew that it would not do to miss.

I drew a deep breath, and slowly pressed on the trigger. The buck stood still as a stone.

"Bang! thud!" The antelope sprang into the air and fell on the rock dead as a door nail.

A groan of terror burst from the group before us.

"If ye want meat," I remarked coolly, "go fetch that buck."

The old man made a sign, and one of his followers went off, and presently came back with the antelope. They gathered round the body, gazing at the bullet-hole.

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"Ye see," I said, "I do not speak empty words."

There was no answer.

"If ye doubt our power," I went on, "let one of you stand upon that rock that I may make him as this buck."

None of them seemed to take the hint, till at last the king's son spoke.

"It is well said. Do thou, my uncle, go stand upon the rock. It is but a buck that the magic has killed. Surely it cannot kill a man."

The old gentleman did not take the idea at all well. Indeed, he seemed hurt.

"No! no!" he said hastily, "my old eyes have seen enough. These are wizards, indeed. Let us bring them to the king. Yet if any wish a further proof, let *him* stand upon the rock, that the magic tube may speak with him."

"Let not good magic be wasted on our poor bodies," said one, "we are satisfied. All the witchcraft of our people cannot show the like of this."

"It is so," remarked the old gentleman; "without any doubt it is so. Listen, children of the Stars, children of the shining eye and the movable teeth, who roar out in thunder and slay from afar. I am Infadoos, son of Kafa, once king of the Kukuana people. This youth is Scragga, son of Twala, the great king—Twala the One-eyed, the Black, the Terrible."

"So," said I, "lead us then to Twala. We do not talk with low people and underlings."

"It is well, my lords, we will lead you, but the way is long. We are hunting three days' journey from the place of the king. But let my lords have patience, and we will lead them."

"So be it," I said carelessly; "all time is before us, for we do not die. We are ready, lead on."

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The old man made a deep obeisance, and murmured the words "*Koom, Koom*", which I afterwards discovered was their royal salute, and turning, addressed his followers. They at once proceeded to lay hold of all our goods, in order to bear them for us, excepting only the guns, which they would on no account touch. They even seized Good's clothes, that, as the reader may remember, were neatly folded up beside him.

He saw and made a dive for them, and a loud argument followed.

"Let not my lord of the transparent Eye and the melting Teeth touch them," said the old man. "Surely his slaves shall carry the things."

"But I want to put 'em on!" roared Good, in English. Umbopa translated.

"Nay, my lord," answered Infadoos, "would my lord cover up his beautiful white legs from the eyes of his servants? Have we offended my lord that he should do such a thing?"

"Damn it!" roared Good, "that black villain has got my trousers."

"Look here, Good," said Sir Henry, "you have appeared in this country in a certain character, and you must live up to it. It will never do for you to put on trousers again. You must manage to exist in a flannel shirt, a pair of boots, and an eye-glass."

"Yes," I said, "and with whiskers on one side of your face and not on the other. If you change any of these things the people will think that we are frauds. I am very sorry for you, but, seriously, you must do it. If they once begin to suspect us our lives will not be worth a brass farthing."

Good sighed, and said no more, but it took him a fortnight to get used to his new costume.

CHAPTER VII

WE ENTER KUKUANALAND

ALL that afternoon we travelled along the magnificent roadway. Infadoos and Scragga walked with us, but their followers marched about a hundred paces ahead.

"Infadoos," I said at length, "who made this road?"

"It was made, my lord, of old time, none knows how or when, not even the wise woman Gagool, who has lived for generations. We are not old enough to remember its making. None can make such roads now, but the king suffers no grass to grow upon it."

"When did the Kukuana people come into this country?"

"My lord, the race came down here like the breath of a storm ten thousand moons ago, from the great lands which lie there beyond," and he pointed to the north. "They could travel no farther because of the high mountains which ring in the land, so say our fathers, and so says Gagool, the wise woman, the smeller-out of witches," and again he pointed to the snow-clad peaks. "The country, too, was good, so they settled here and grew strong and powerful, and now our numbers are like the sea sand, and when Twala the king calls up his regiments their plumes cover the plain so far as the eye of man can reach."

"And if the land is walled in with mountains, who is there for the regiments to fight with?"

"Nay, my lord, the country is open there towards the north, and now and again, warriors sweep down upon

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us in clouds from a land we know not, and we slay them. It is many moons since there was a war."

"Your warriors must grow weary of resting on their spears, Infadoos."

"My lord, there was one war, just after we destroyed the people that came down upon us."

"How was that?"

"My brother Twala, who is now the king had also a twin brother named Imotu. It is not our custom, my lord, to allow twins to live, the weaker must always die. But their mother hid away the feebler child and kept him hidden, and that child is now Twala the king."

"Well?"

"When our father died, my brother Imotu was at first made king in his place, and for a while reigned and had a son by his favourite wife. When this baby was three years old, a famine came upon the land, and the people murmured because of the famine. Then it was that Gagool made a proclamation to the people, saying, 'The king Imotu is no king.' And at the time Imotu was sick with a wound, and lay in his kraal not able to move.

"Then Gagool went into a hut and led out Twala, twin brother to the king, whom she had hidden for long years among the caves and rocks, and stripping the *moocha* (waist-cloth) off his loins, showed the people of the Kukuanas the mark of the sacred snake coiled round his middle, and cried out loud, 'Behold your king!'

"Just as the tumult was at its height Imotu the king, though he was very sick, crawled from his hut holding his wife by the hand, and followed by his little son Igmosi.

"Then Twala, his own brother, ran to Imotu, and taking him by the hair, stabbed him through the heart

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with his knife. And the people clapped their hands and cried, '*Twala is king!* Now we know that Twala is king!'"

"And what became of Imotu's wife and her baby son Ignosi? Did Twala kill them too?"

"Nay, my lord. When she saw that her lord was dead, the queen seized the child and ran away. Two days afterwards she came to a kraal very hungry, and a little child crept out and brought her corn to eat. Then she went on towards the mountains with her boy before the sun rose again, and there she must have perished, for none have seen her since, nor the child Ignosi."

"Then if this child Ignosi had lived he would be the true king of the Kukuana people?"

"That is so, my lord; the sacred snake is round his middle. If he lives he is king; but, alas! he is long dead."

"See, my lord," and Infadoos pointed to a vast collection of huts that lay on the plain beneath us. "That is the kraal where the wife of Imotu was last seen with the child Ignosi. It is there that we shall sleep tonight, if indeed my lords sleep at all upon this earth."

"When we are among the Kukuanas, my good friend, we do as the Kukuanas do," I said majestically.

So soon as we started Infadoos had despatched a runner to warn the people of our arrival. When we arrived within two miles of the kraal we could see that company after company of men were issuing from its gates and marching towards us.

Sir Henry laid his hand upon my arm, and remarked that it looked as though we were going to meet with a warm reception. Something in his tone attracted Infadoos' attention.

"Let not my lords be afraid," he said hastily. "This

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regiment is one under my command, and comes out by my orders to greet you."

I nodded easily, though I was not quite easy in my mind.

About half a mile from the gates of this kraal is a long stretch of rising ground sloping gently upwards from the road, and here the companies formed up. It was a splendid sight to see them charging swiftly up the rise, with flashing spears and waving plumes. By the time we reached the slope twelve companies, or three thousand six hundred men, had taken up their positions along the road.

Presently we came to the first company, the most magnificent set of warriors that I have ever seen. They were mostly veterans of about forty, and not one of them was under six feet three or four. They wore upon their heads heavy black plumes of feathers. Round their waists and also beneath the right knee were bound circlets of white ox-tails, and in their left hands they carried round white shields. Their main weapon consisted of a short and very heavy two-edged spear with a wooden shaft, the blade being about six inches across at the widest part. These spears are not used for throwing, but are for close quarters only, when the wound inflicted by them is terrible. In addition every man carried three large and heavy knives, each knife weighing about two pounds. One knife was fixed in the ox-tail girdle, and the other two at the back of the round shield. These knives (which are called *tollas*) the Kukuana warriors can cast with great accuracy to a distance of fifty yards, and it is their custom when charging to hurl a volley of them at the enemy.

Each company remained still as a collection of bronze statues till we were opposite it, when at a signal,

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every spear was raised into the air, and from three hundred throats sprang forth with a sudden roar the royal salute of "*Koom!*" Then, as soon as we had passed, the company formed up behind us towards the kraal, till at last the whole regiment of the "Greys"—so called from their white shields—was marching in our rear with a tread that shook the ground.

At length, branching off from Solomon's Great Road, we came to the kraal, which is at least a mile round, and strongly fenced. The huts are dome-shaped, and built of a framework of wattle, beautifully thatched with grass; unlike Zulu huts, they have doorways through which we could walk.

When we reached the centre of the kraal, Infadoos halted at the door of a large hut, which was surrounded by a circle of smaller ones.

"Enter, Sons of the Stars," he said, in a loud voice, "and rest awhile in our humble habitations. A little food shall be brought to you; some honey and some milk, and an ox or two, and a few sheep; not much, my lords, but still a little food."

"It is good," said I. "Infadoos, we are weary with travelling; now let us rest."

So we entered the hut, which we found prepared for our comfort. Couches of skins were spread for us to lie on, and water was placed for us to wash in.

Presently we heard a shouting outside, and stepping to the door, saw a line of girls bearing boiled ox-meat, milk and roasted mealies, and honey in a pot.

While all this was being set down, we sent a message to Infadoos, and asked him and Scragga, the king's son, to join us.

Presently they came, and sitting down upon little stools, they helped us to get through our dinner. The

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old gentleman was most polite, but it struck me that the young one regarded us with doubt—which made me feel rather uncomfortable.

In the course of our meal Sir Henry suggested to me that we should ask about his brother; but, on the whole, I thought that it would be wiser to say nothing at this time.

After supper we filled our pipes and lit them, which filled Infadoos and Scragga with astonishment. Like the Zulus, they only use tobacco for snuff, and quite failed to recognize it in its new form.

Presently I asked Infadoos when we were to proceed on our journey, and was delighted to learn that we were to start at dawn; he himself was to accompany us and expected that we should reach Loo on the night of the second day. Then our visitors said good-night; and having arranged to watch in turn, three of us slept, whilst the fourth sat up on the look-out for treachery.

CHAPTER VIII

TWALA THE KING

OUR journey to Loo took two full days' travelling along Solomon's Great Road. As we went along we were overtaken by thousands of warriors hurrying to be present at the great annual review and festival, and more splendid troops I never saw.

At sunset on the second day we stopped to rest upon the summit of some heights over which the road ran, and there on a beautiful plain before us lay Loo itself. For a native town it is an enormous place, quite five miles round, I should say, with a curious horseshoe-shaped hill about two miles to the north. Sixty or seventy miles away were three great snow-capped mountains, placed at the points of a triangle.

Infadoos saw us looking at them. "The road ends at the Three Witches," he said, pointing to the mountains.

"Why does it end?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he answered with a shrug; "the mountains are full of caves, and there is a great pit between them. It is there that the wise men of old time used to go to get whatever it was they came to this country for; and it is there now that our kings are buried in the Place of Death."

"What was it they came for?" I asked eagerly.

"Nay, I know not. My lords who have dropped from the Stars should know," he answered with a quick look.

"Yes," I went on, "you are right, in the Stars we learn many things. I have heard, for instance, that the

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wise men of old came to these mountains to get bright stones, and yellow iron."

"My lord is wise," he answered coldly; "I am but a child and cannot talk with my lord on such matters. My lord must speak with Gagool the old, at the king's place, who is wise even as my lord," and he went away.

So soon as he was gone I turned to the others, and pointed out the mountains. "There are Solomon's diamond mines," I said.

Umbopa was standing with them, apparently deep in thought as he so often was, and caught my words.

"Yes, Macumazahn," he put in, in Zulu, "the diamonds are there, and you shall have them since you white men are so fond of toys and money."

"How dost thou know that, Umbopa?" I asked sharply, for I did not like his mysterious ways.

He laughed. "I dreamed it in the night, white man," and then he too turned upon his heel and went.

"Now what," said Sir Henry, "is our black friend at? He knows more than he chooses to say, that is clear. By the way, Quatermain, has he heard anything of—of my brother?"

"Nothing; he has asked every one he has become friendly with, but they all declare that no white man has ever been seen in the country before."

"Do you suppose that he got here at all?" suggested Good; "we have only reached the place by a miracle; is it likely he could have reached it without the map?"

"I don't know," said Sir Henry gloomily, "but somehow I think that I shall find him."

Slowly the sun sank, and then suddenly darkness rushed down on the land. But not for long, for in the east there was a glow, and soon the full moon rose and lighted the plain.

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We stood and watched the lovely sight, but were interrupted by our polite friend Infadoos.

"If my lords are rested we will journey on to Loo, where a hut is made ready for tonight. The moon is now bright, so that we shall not fall by the way."

In an hour's time we were at the outskirts of the town, which appeared absolutely endless. After nearly half an hour's tramp, past lines of huts, Infadoos halted by a little group of huts which surrounded a small courtyard.

These huts were superior to any that we had yet seen, and in each was a most comfortable bed made of tanned skins, spread upon mattresses of sweet grass. Food too was ready for us, and as soon as we had washed ourselves with water, which stood ready in earthenware jars, some girls brought us roasted meats, and mealie cobs served on wooden platters.

We ate and drank, and when the beds had all been moved into one hut by our request, we flung ourselves down to sleep, thoroughly wearied with our long journey.

When we woke it was to find the sun high in the heavens. By the time we had eaten our breakfasts, and smoked a pipe, a message was brought to us by Infadoos himself that Twala the king was ready to see us, if we would be pleased to come.

After walking a few hundred yards we came to an enclosure, about six or seven acres of ground. All round the outside fence stood a row of huts, which were the habitation of the king's wives. Exactly opposite the gateway was a very large hut, built by itself, in which his majesty resided. All the rest was filled by company after company of warriors, to the number of seven or eight thousand.

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The space in front of the large hut was empty, but before it were placed several stools. On three of these, at a sign from Infadoos, we seated ourselves, Umbopa standing behind us. As for Infadoos, he took up a position by the door of the hut. So we waited for ten minutes or more in the midst of dead silence. At length the door of the hut opened, and a gigantic figure, with a splendid tiger-skin karross flung over its shoulders, stepped out, followed by the boy Scragga, and what appeared to be a withered-up monkey, wrapped in a fur cloak. The figure seated itself upon a stool, Scragga took his stand behind it, and the withered-up monkey crept on all fours into the shade of the hut and squatted down.

Still there was silence.

Then the gigantic figure slipped off the karross and stood up before us. It was an enormous man with the most repulsive face we had ever seen. The man's lips were thick as a negro's, the nose was flat, he had one single gleaming black eye, and his whole expression was cruel and evil. From the large head rose a magnificent plume of white ostrich feathers, his body was clothed in shining chain armour, whilst round the waist and right knee was the usual white ox-tail. In his right hand was a huge spear, about the neck a thick circle of gold, and bound on to the forehead a single and enormous uncut diamond.

Still there was a silence; but not for long. Presently the man, whom we guessed to be the king, raised the great javelin in his hand. Instantly eight thousand spears were lifted in answer, and from eight thousand throats rang out the royal salute of "*Koom*." Three times this was repeated, and each time the earth shook with the noise.

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"Be humble, O people," piped out a thin voice which seemed to come from the monkey in the shade, "it is the king."

"*It is the king*," boomed out eight thousand throats in answer. "*Be humble, O people, it is the king.*"

Then there was dead silence again—dead silence. Presently, however, it was broken. A soldier on our left dropped his shield, which fell with a clatter on to the limestone flooring.

Twala turned his cold eye in the direction of the noise.

"Come hither, thou," he said in a cold voice.

A fine young man stepped out of the ranks, and stood before him.

"It was thy shield that fell, thou awkward dog. Wilt thou make me a reproach in the eyes of these strangers from the Stars? What hast thou to say?"

We saw the poor fellow turn pale under his dusky skin.

"It was by chance, O Calf of the Black Cow," he murmured.

"Then it is a chance for which thou must pay. Thou hast made me foolish; prepare for death."

"I am the king's ox," was the low answer.

"Scragga," roared the king, "let me see how thou canst use thy spear. Kill this awkward dog."

Scragga stepped forward with an ugly grin, and lifted his spear. The poor victim covered his eyes with his hand and stood still. As for us, we were petrified with horror.

Once, twice, he waved the spear and then struck right home—the spear stood out a foot behind the soldier's back. He flung up his hands and dropped dead. From the multitude about us rose something like a murmur, it rolled round and round, and died away.

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"The thrust was a good one," said the king; "take him away."

Four men stepped out of the ranks, and lifting the body of the murdered man, carried it thence.

"Cover up the blood-stains, cover them up," piped out the thin voice again; "the king's word is spoken, the king's doom is done!"

Thereupon a girl came forward from behind the hut, bearing a jar filled with powdered lime, which she scattered over the red mark, blotting it from sight.

Sir Henry meanwhile was boiling with rage; indeed, we could barely keep him still.

"Sit down, for heaven's sake," I whispered; "our lives depend on it."

He gave way and remained silent.

Then Twala addressed us.

"White people," he said, "greeting."

"Greeting, Twala, King of the Kukuanas," I answered.

"White people, whence come ye, and what seek ye?"

"We come from the Stars, ask us not how. We come to see this land."

"Ye journey from far to see a little thing. And that man with you," pointing to Umbopa, "does he also come from the Stars?"

"Even so; there are people of thy colour in the heavens above; but ask not of matters too high for thee, Twala the king."

"Ye speak with a loud voice, people of the Stars," Twala answered in a tone which I scarcely liked. "Remember that the Stars are far off, and ye are here. How if I make you as him whom they bore away?"

I laughed out loud, though there was little laughter in my heart.

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"O king," I said, "be careful, walk warily over hot stones, lest thou burn thy feet; hold the spear by the handle, lest thou cut thy hands. Touch but one hair of our heads, and destruction shall come upon thee. Have not these"—pointing to Infadoos and Scragga—"told thee what manner of men we are? Hast thou seen the like of us?" and I pointed to Good, feeling quite sure that he had never seen anybody before who looked in the least like *him*.

"It is true, I have not," said the king, surveying him.

"Have they not told thee how we strike with death from afar?" I went on.

"They have told me, but I believe them not. Let me see you kill. Kill me a man among those who stand yonder"—and he pointed to the opposite side of the kraal—"and I will believe."

"Nay," I answered; "we shed no blood of men except in punishment; but if thou wilt see, bid thy servants drive in an ox through the kraal gates, and before he has run twenty paces I will strike him dead."

"Nay," laughed the king, "kill me a man, and I will believe."

"Good, O king, so be it," I answered coolly; "do thou walk across the open space, and before thy feet reach the gate thou shalt be dead; or if thou wilt not, send thy son Scragga."

On hearing this Scragga uttered a sort of howl, and bolted into the hut.

Twala frowned; the suggestion did not please him.

"Let a young ox be driven in," he said.

Two men at once departed, running swiftly.

"Now, Sir Henry," said I, "do you shoot. I want to show this ruffian that I am not the only magician of the party."

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Sir Henry accordingly took the "express", and made ready.

"I hope I shall make a good shot," he groaned.

"You must," I answered. "If you miss with the first barrel, let him have the second. Sight for 150 yards and wait till the beast turns broadside on."

Then came a pause, until presently we caught sight of an ox running straight for the kraal gate. It came on through the gate, and then, catching sight of the vast concourse of people, stopped stupidly, turned round, and bellowed.

"Now's your time," I whispered.

Up went the rifle.

Bang! *thud!* and the ox was kicking on his back, shot in the ribs. The semi-hollow bullet had done its work well, and a sigh of astonishment went up from the assembled thousands.

I turned round coolly—

"Have I lied, O king?"

"Nay, white man, it is the truth," was the somewhat awed answer.

"Listen, Twala," I went on. "Thou hast seen. Now know we come in peace, not in war. See," and I held up the Winchester repeater; "we give this magic tube to thee, Twala, and by-and-by I will show thee how to use it; but beware how thou turnest the magic of the Stars against a man of earth," and I handed him the rifle.

The king took it very gingerly, and laid it down at his feet. As he did so I observed the wizened monkey-like figure creeping from the shadow of the hut. It crept on all fours, but when it reached the place where the king sat it rose upon its feet. Throwing the furry covering from its face it revealed a most weird face. Apparently it was a woman of great age, so shrunken that it

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seemed no larger than the face of a year-old child, although a mass of deep and yellow wrinkles. Set in these wrinkles was a sunken slit, the mouth, beneath which the chin curved to a point. There was no nose to speak of; but a pair of large black eyes gleamed under the snow-white eyebrows. The head itself was perfectly bare and yellow, while its wrinkled scalp moved and contracted like the hood of a cobra.

Suddenly the creature shot out a skinny claw armed with nails nearly an inch long, and laying it on the shoulder of Twala began to speak in a thin and piercing voice—

“Listen, O king! Listen, O warriors! Listen, O men and women, O youths and maidens! Listen, the spirit of life is in me, and I prophesy. I prophesy!”

The words died away in a faint wail, and terror struck us all.

“*Blood! blood! blood!* rivers of blood; blood everywhere. I see it, I smell it. I taste it—it is salt! it runs red upon the ground, it rains down from the skies.

“*Footsteps! footsteps! footsteps!* the tread of the white man coming from afar. It shakes the earth; the earth trembles before her master.”

Then she turned her bald vulture-head towards us.

“What seek ye, white men of the Stars? Do ye seek a lost one? Ye shall not find him here. Ye came for bright stones; I know it—I know it; ye shall find them when the blood is dry: but shall ye return whence ye came, or shall ye stop with me? *Ha! ha! ha!*”

“And thou, thou with the dark skin and the proud bearing,” and she pointed her skinny finger at Umbopa, “who art *thou*, and what seekest *thou*? Methinks I know thee; methinks I can smell the smell of the blood in thy heart. Strip off the girdle——”

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Here she fell to the ground foaming in a fit, and was carried into the hut.

The king rose up trembling, and waved his hand. Instantly the regiments began to file off, and in ten minutes, except for ourselves, the king, and a few attendants, the great space was left empty.

“White people,” he said, “it is in my mind to kill you. Gagool has spoken strange words. What say ye?”

I laughed. “Be careful, O king, we are not easy to slay. Thou hast seen the fate of the ox; wouldst thou be as the ox is?”

The king frowned. “It is not well to threaten a king.”

“We threaten not, we speak what is true. Try to kill us, O king, and learn.”

The great savage put his hand to his forehead and thought.

“Go in peace,” he said at length. “Tonight is the great dance. Ye shall see it. Fear not that I shall set a snare for you. Tomorrow I will think.”

“It is well, O king,” I answered casually, and then, accompanied by Infadoos, we rose and went back to our kraal.

CHAPTER IX

THE WITCH-HUNT

ON reaching our hut I signed to Infadoos to enter with us.

"Now, Infadoos," I said, "we would speak with thee."

"Let my lords say on."

"It seems to us, Infadoos, that Twala the king is a cruel man."

"It is so, my lords. Alas! the land cries out because of his cruelties. Tonight ye shall see. It is the great witch-hunt, and no man's life is safe. If the king desires a man's cattle, or if he fears a man, then Gagool will smell that man out as a wizard, and he will be killed. Many must die before the moon grows pale tonight. I have been spared because I am skilled in war, but I know not how long I have to live. The land is wearied of Twala and his ways."

"Then why is it, Infadoos, that the people do not cast him down?"

"Nay, my lords, he is the king. If he were killed Scragga would reign in his place, and the heart of Scragga is blacker still. If Imotu had never been slain, or if Ignosi his son had lived, it might have been otherwise; but they are both dead."

"How knowest thou that Ignosi is dead?" said a voice behind us. We looked round astonished to see who spoke. It was Umbopa. •

"What meanest thou, boy?" asked Infadoos; "who told thee to speak?"

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"Listen, Infadoos," was the answer, "and I will tell thee a story. Years ago the king Imotu was killed in this country and his wife fled with the boy Ignosi. It is said also that the woman and her son died upon the mountains. Is it not so?"

"It is even so."

"Well, it came to pass that the mother and the boy Ignosi did not die. They crossed the mountains, and were led by a tribe of desert men across the sands beyond, till at last they came to water and grass and trees again."

"How knowest thou this?"

"Listen. They travelled on and on, many months' journey, till they reached the land of the Amazulu, and with them they remained many years, till at length the mother fell sick and died. Then the son Ignosi became a wanderer again, and journeyed into a land of the white people."

"It is a pretty story," said Infadoos.

"For years he lived there working as a servant and a soldier. And at last the time came, and he met some white men who were seeking this unknown land, and joined himself to them. The white men crossed the burning desert, they crossed the snow-clad mountains, and reached the land of the Kukuanas, and there they found *thee*, O Infadoos."

"Surely thou art mad," said the astonished old soldier.

"Thou thinkest so; see, I will show thee, O my uncle. *I am Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas!*"

Then with a single movement Umbopa slipped off his *moocha* or girdle, and stood naked before us.

"Look," he said, "what is this?" and he pointed to the picture of a great snake tattooed in blue around his middle, its tail disappearing into its open mouth.

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Infadoos looked, and then fell upon his knees.

"*Koom! Koom!*" he ejaculated; "it is my brother's son; it is the king."

"Did I not tell thee so, my uncle? Rise; I am not yet the king, but with thy help, and with the help of these brave white men, I shall be. And now, Infadoos, choose thou. Wilt thou put thy hands between my hands, and be my man? Wilt thou help me to overthrow this tyrant, or wilt thou not? Choose thou."

The old man put his hand to his head and thought. Then he rose, and advancing to where Umbopa, or rather Ignosi, stood, he knelt before him and took his hand.

"Ignosi, rightful king of the Kukuanas, I put my hand between thy hands, and am thy man till death."

"It is well, Infadoos; if I conquer, thou shalt be the greatest man in the kingdom after the king. If I fail, thou canst only die, and death is not far from thee. Rise, my uncle.

"And ye, white men, will ye help me? What have I to offer you! The white stones! If I conquer and can find them, ye shall have as many as ye can carry. Will that satisfy you?"

I translated this remark.

"Tell him," answered Sir Henry, "wealth is good, but a gentleman does not sell himself for wealth. I have always liked Umbopa, and I will stand by him in this business. What do you say, Good, and you, Quatermain?"

"Well," said Good, "so far as I am concerned I'm his boy. My only condition is that he allows me to wear trousers."

I translated again.

"It is well, my friends," said Ignosi; "and what

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sayest thou, Macumazahn, art thou also with me, old hunter?"

I thought awhile.

"Umbopa or Ignosi," I said, "I don't like revolutions. I am a man of peace, but, on the other hand, I stick to my friends. But I am a trader, and have to make my living, so I accept your offer about those diamonds. Another thing: we came to look for Incubu's lost brother. You must help us to find him."

"That I will do," answered Ignosi. "Stay, Infadoos, by the sign of the snake about my middle, tell me the truth. Has any white man to thy knowledge set his foot within the land?"

"None, O Ignosi."

"Thou hearest, Incubu," said Ignosi to Sir Henry; "he has not been here."

"Well, well," said Sir Henry, with a sigh; "there it is; I suppose that he never got so far. Poor fellow, poor fellow!"

"Now for business," I put in. "How dost thou, Ignosi, intend to become a king in fact?"

"Nay, I know not. Infadoos, hast thou a plan?"

"Ignosi, Son of the Lightning," answered his uncle, "tonight is the great dance and witch-hunt. Many shall perish, and in the hearts of many others there will be anger against the king Twala. When the dance is over, I will speak to some of the great chiefs. They in turn, if I can win them over, will speak to their regiments. I think that by dawn thou shalt have twenty thousand spears at thy command. After the dance, if I am alive, and we are all alive, I will meet thee here, and we can talk."

At this moment there was a cry that messengers had come from the king. Presently three men entered, each

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bearing a shining shirt of chain armour, and a magnificent battle-axe.

"The gifts of my lord the king to the white men from the Stars!" said a herald who came with them.

"We thank the king," I answered; "ye may go."

The men went, and we examined the armour. It was the most wonderful chain work that we had ever seen.

"Do you make these things in this country, Infadoos?" I asked; "they are very beautiful."

"Nay, my lord, they came down to us from our forefathers.¹ They are magic coats through which no spear can pass. The king is well pleased or much afraid, or he would not have sent these garments of steel. Clothe yourselves in them tonight, my lords."

The rest of the day we spent quietly. At last the sun went down and the thousand watch fires glowed out. Through the darkness we heard the tramp of many feet and the clashing of hundreds of spears, as the regiments took up their positions. Infadoos arrived in his war dress, with a guard of twenty men to escort us to the dance. We had already put on the shirts of chain armour which the king had sent us, wearing them under our ordinary clothing. Now, strapping our revolvers round our waists, and taking in our hands the battle-axes, we started.

On arriving at the great kraal, we found that it was closely packed with some twenty thousand men arranged in regiments and companies. We advanced steadily towards the centre of the open space in the midst of which were placed some stools. Then we per-

¹ In the Soudan, swords and coats of mail are still worn by Arabs, whose ancestors must have stripped them from the bodies of Crusaders.—*Editor.*

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ceived another small party coming from the direction of the royal hut.

"It is the king Twala, Scragga his son, and Gagool the old; and see, with them are those who slay," and Infadoos pointed to a little group of a dozen gigantic men, armed with spears in one hand and heavy clubs in the other.

The king seated himself upon the centre stool, Gagool crouched at his feet, and the others stood behind him.

"Greeting, white lords," Twala cried, as we came up; "be seated, waste not precious time—the night is all too short for the deeds that must be done."

"*Begin! begin!*" piped Gagool, in her piercing voice; "the hyaenas are hungry, they howl for food. *Begin! begin!*"

The king lifted his spear, and suddenly twenty thousand feet were raised, as though they belonged to one man, and brought down with a stamp upon the earth. This was repeated three times, causing the solid ground to shake and tremble. Then from a far point of the circle a solitary voice began a wailing song, of which the refrain ran something as follows:

"What is the lot of man born of woman?"

Back came the answer rolling out from every throat in that vast company—

"Death!"

Gradually the song was taken up by company after company, till the whole armed multitude were singing it.

Again silence fell upon the place, and again it was broken by the king lifting his hand. Instantly we heard a pattering of feet, and from out of the masses of warriors strange and awful figures appeared running towards us. As they drew near we saw that these were women, most of them aged. Their faces were painted

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in stripes of white and yellow; down their backs hung snake-skins, and round their waists rattled circlets of human bones. Each one held a small forked wand in her shrivelled hand. In all there were ten of them. When they arrived in front of us they halted, and one of them pointing with her wand towards the crouching figure of Gagool, cried out—

“Mother, old mother, we are here.”

“*Good! good! good!*” she answered. “Are your eyes keen, *Isanusi*, are ye ready to do the justice of ‘Heaven above’, ye whom I have taught, who have eaten of the bread of my wisdom, and drunk of the water of my magic?”

“Mother, we are.”

“Then go! Tarry not, ye vultures. *Go!*”

With a wild yell Gagool’s servants broke away in every direction. We could not watch them all, so we fixed our eyes upon the *Isanusi* nearest to us. When she came within a few paces of the warriors, she halted and began to dance wildly, whirling round and round and shrieking out, “I smell him, the evil-doer!” “He is near, he who poisoned his mother!” “I hear the thoughts of him who thought evil of the king!”

Quicker and quicker she danced, till the foam flew from her gnashing jaws, and her eyes seemed to start from her head. Suddenly she stopped dead and stiffened all over, like a pointer dog when he scents game, and with outstretched wand she began to creep stealthily towards the soldiers before her. Presently she halted and pointed and again crept on a pace or two.

Suddenly the end came. With a shriek she sprang in and touched a tall warrior with her forked wand. Instantly two of his comrades seized the doomed man and dragged him towards the king.

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As he came, two executioners stepped forward to meet him.

"*Kill!*" said the king.

"*Kill!*" squeaked Gagool.

"*Kill!*" re-echoed Scragga, with a hollow chuckle.

Almost before the words were uttered the deed was done. One man had driven his spear into the victim's heart, and the other had dashed out his brains with a great club.

"*One,*" counted Twala, the king.

Hardly was the thing done before another poor wretch was brought up. This time we could see, from the leopard-skin cloak, that the man was a person of rank. Again the awful words were spoken, and the victim fell dead.

"*Two,*" counted the king.

And so the deadly game went on, till about a hundred bodies were stretched in rows behind us. About half-past ten there was a pause. Then Gagool again sprang to and fro, gradually drawing nearer and nearer to ourselves.

"Hang me if I don't believe she is going to try her games on us," cried Good in horror.

"Nonsense," said Sir Henry.

Nearer and nearer she came. At last she stood still and pointed.

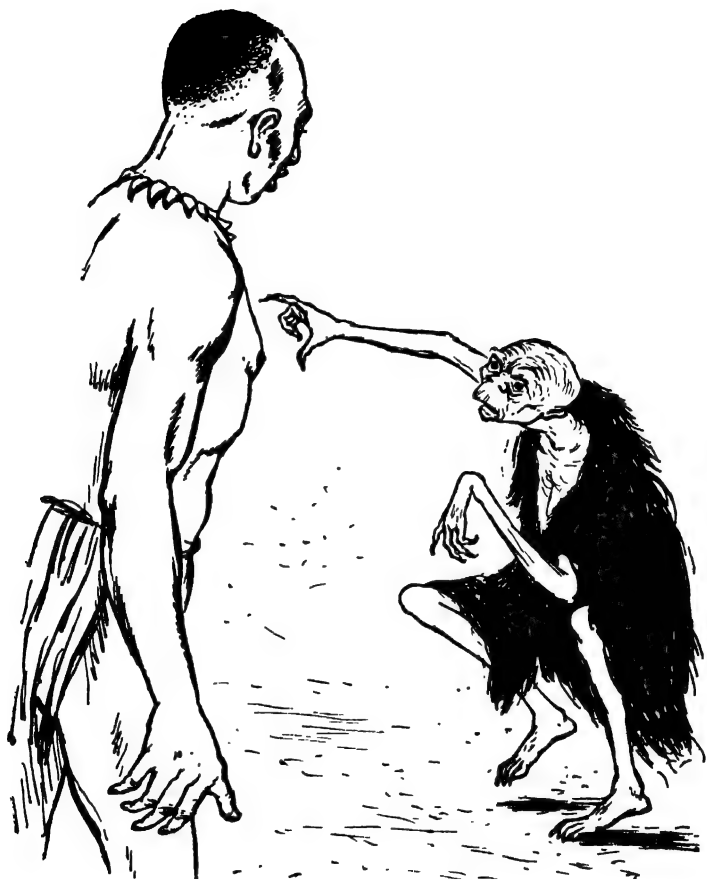
"Which is it to be?" asked Sir Henry to himself.

In a moment we knew, for the old hag had rushed in and touched Umbopa on the shoulder.

"I smell him out," she shrieked. "Kill him, kill him, he is full of evil; kill him, the stranger, before blood flows for him. Slay him, O king."

There was a pause, during which I rose from my seat.

"O king," I called out, "this man is the servant



' AT LAST SHE STOOD STILL AND POINTED ' ●

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of thy guests; whoever sheds his blood sheds our blood."

"Gagool has smelt him out; he must die, white men," was the sullen answer.

"Nay, he shall not die," I replied; "he who tries to touch him shall die indeed."

"Seize him!" roared Twala to the executioners.

"Stand back, ye dogs!" I shouted, "if ye would see tomorrow's light. Touch one hair of his head and your king dies," and I covered Twala with my revolver.

Twala winced as my barrel came in line with his broad chest.

"Well," I said, "what is it to be, Twala?"

Then he spoke.

"Put away your magic tubes," he said; "I spare him. Go in peace."

"It is well," I answered; "we are weary and would sleep. Is the dance ended?"

"It is ended," Twala answered sulkily, and lifted his spear.

Instantly the regiments began to file through the kraal gateway in perfect silence. We rose also, and making a bow to his majesty, we departed to our huts.

CHAPTER X

WE GIVE A SIGN

FOR a long while we sat in silence, for we were all badly shaken by what we had seen. At last, just as we were thinking of turning in—for it was nearly dawn—we heard a sound of steps. Then came the challenge of a sentry; and in another second Infadoos had entered the hut, followed by some half-dozen chiefs.

"My lords," he said, "I have come according to my word. I have brought with me these men who are great men among us. Now let them also behold the sacred snake around thee, and hear thy story, Ignosi, that they may say whether they will make cause with thee against Twala the king."

Ignosi again stripped off his girdle and exhibited the snake tattooed about him. Each chief in turn drew near and examined the sign by the dim light of the lamp, and without saying a word passed on to the other side.

Then Ignosi put his *moocha* on again, and told once more the story of his life.

"Now ye have heard," said Infadoos, when he had finished. "Choose then, my brothers."

The eldest of the six men, a short, thick-set warrior, with white hair, stepped forward a pace and answered—

"This is a great matter, and the thing is hard to believe. How know we that if we lift our spears it may not be for a cheat and a liar? These white men from the Stars, their magic is great. If he be indeed the rightful king, let them give us a sign, and let the people have a sign, that all may see."

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The others all agreed, and I turned to Sir Henry and Good, and explained the situation.

"I think that I have it," said Good, smiling; "ask them to give us a moment to think."

I did so, and the chiefs withdrew. So soon as they had gone Good went to the little box where he kept his medicines, unlocked it, and took out a note-book. "Now look here, you fellows, isn't tomorrow the 4th of June?" he said.

We had kept a careful note of the days, so were able to answer that it was.

"Very good; then here we have it—'4 June, total eclipse of the moon commences at 8.15 Greenwich time, visible in Teneriffe—*South Africa*, etc.' There's a sign for you. Tell them we will darken the moon tomorrow night."

"Well," said Sir Henry, "I suppose we had better risk it."

I sent Umbopa to summon the chiefs back. Presently they came, and I addressed them thus—

"Great men of the Kukuanas, and thou, Infadoos, listen. We love not to show our powers, but since this matter is a great one, we are ready to give such a sign that all men may see. Come hither"; and I led them to the door of the hut and pointed to the red ball of the fading moon. "What see ye there?"

"We see the dying moon," answered one of them.

"I tell you that tomorrow night, two hours before midnight, we will cause the moon to be eaten up for the space of an hour and half an hour. It shall be for a sign that Ignosi is indeed king of the Kukuanas. If we do this thing, will ye be satisfied?"

"Yes, my lords," answered the old chief with a smile, "if ye do this thing we will be satisfied indeed."

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"It shall be done; we three, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn, have said it, and it shall be done. Dost thou hear, Infadoos?"

"It is well, my lords. Today, two hours after sunset, Twala will send for my lords to witness the girls dance. One hour after the dance begins, the girl whom Twala thinks the fairest shall be killed by Scragga, the king's son, as a sacrifice to the silent Stone Ones," and he pointed towards the three strange-looking peaks where Solomon's road was supposed to end. "Then let my lords darken the moon, and save the maiden's life, and the people will believe indeed."

"Ay," said the old chief, still smiling a little, "the people will believe indeed."

"Two miles from Loo," went on Infadoos, "there is a hill where my regiment, and other regiments which these chiefs command, are stationed. If in truth my lords can darken the moon, in the darkness I will take my lords by the hand and lead them out of Loo, and we will make war upon Twala the king."

"It is good," said I. "Now leave us to sleep awhile and to make ready our magic."

Infadoos rose, and having saluted us, departed with the chiefs.

Thoroughly wearied out, we were soon sound asleep, and slept till Ignosi woke us about eleven o'clock. Then we rose, washed, and ate a hearty breakfast. After that we went outside the hut and walked about, amusing ourselves with examining the Kukuana huts and the people.

Returning to the hut we ate some dinner, and passed the rest of the day in receiving visitors. At length the sun set, and finally, about half-past eight, a messenger came from Twala to bid us to the great annual "dance of girls".

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Hastily we put on the chain shirts and taking our rifles and ammunition with us, we started off boldly enough. The great space in front of the king's kraal looked very different now. Instead of the grim ranks of warriors there were company after company of Kukuana girls, each crowned with a wreath of flowers, and holding a palm leaf in one hand and a white arum lily in the other. In the centre of the open moonlit space sat Twala the king, with old Gagool at his feet, attended by Infadoos, the boy Scragga, and twelve guards. There were also present about a score of chiefs, amongst whom I recognised most of our friends of the night before.

"Welcome, white men from the Stars," said Twala; "this is another sight from that which your eyes gazed on by the light of last night's moon. Now let the dance begin!"

The girls sprang forward in companies, singing a sweet song and waving the palms and lilies. On and on they danced in the light of the risen moon; now whirling round and round, now swaying, coming forward, falling back. At last they paused, and a beautiful young woman sprang out of the ranks and began to pirouette in front of us. At length she retired exhausted, and another took her place, then another and another, but none of them, either in grace or skill, came up to the first.

When the chosen girls had all danced, the king lifted his hand.

"Which call ye the fairest, white men?" he asked.

"The first," said I at once. Next second I regretted it, for I remembered that Infadoos had told us that the fairest girl must be offered up as a sacrifice.

"Then is my mind as your minds, and my eyes are your eyes. She is the fairest; and she must die!"

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"*Ay, must die!*" piped out Gagool.

"Why, O king?" said I; "the girl has danced well, and pleased us; she is fair too; it would be hard to reward her with death."

Twala laughed as he answered—

"It is our custom, and the figures who sit in stone yonder must have their due." Then turning to the guards—"Bring her hither; Scragga, make sharp thy spear."

Two of the men stepped forward, and as they advanced, the girl screamed aloud and turned to fly. But the strong hands caught her fast, and brought her, struggling and weeping, before us.

"What is thy name, girl?" piped Gagool. "What! wilt thou not answer? Shall the king's son do his work at once?"

At this hint, Scragga advanced a step and lifted his great spear.

"Oh, mother," answered the girl, in trembling accents, "my name is Foulata, of the house of Suko. Oh, mother, why must I die? I have done no wrong!"

Twala turned and motioned to his son, who advanced with his spear lifted.

At this, I stepped with dignity between the girl and the advancing spear of Scragga.

"King," I said, "it shall not be; we will not endure this thing; let the girl go in safety."

Twala rose from his seat in anger.

"*Shall not be!* thou white dog. *Shall not be!* art thou mad? How canst thou save her or thyself? Back, I say. Scragga, kill her! Ho! guards seize these men."

At this cry armed men ran swiftly from behind the hut, where they had evidently been placed beforehand.

"Stop!" I shouted boldly, though at the moment my

WE GIVE A SIGN

heart was in my boots. "Come but one pace nearer, and we will put out the moon and plunge the land in darkness."

My threat had its effect; the men halted, and Scragga stood still before us, his spear lifted.

"Hear him! hear him!" piped Gagool; "hear the liar who says that he will put out the moon like a lamp. Let him do it, and the girl shall be spared. Yes, let him do it, or die like the girl, he and those with him."

I glanced up at the moon, and now to my intense relief saw that we had made no mistake. On its edge lay a faint rim of shadow.

Then I lifted my hand solemnly towards the sky, and quoted a line or two from the "Ingoldsby Legends" in my most impressive voice. Sir Henry followed with a verse out of the Old Testament, whilst Good used the worst language he could think of.

Slowly the shadow crept on to the bright surface, and as it crept I heard deep gasps of fear rising from the multitude around.

"Look, O king!" I cried; "look, Gagool! The moon grows black before your eyes; soon there will be darkness—ay, darkness in the hour of the full moon. Ye have asked for a sign; it is given to you."

There was a groan of terror. As for the king, he sat still and turned pale beneath his dark skin. Only Gagool kept her courage.

"It will pass," she cried; "I have seen the like before; no man can put out the moon; sit still—the shadow will pass."

"Wait, and ye shall see," I replied.

Slowly the dark ring crept on. Everything grew still as death. Slowly the minutes sped away, and the full moon passed deeper and deeper into the shadow of the

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earth. The great pale orb seemed to draw near and to grow in size. It turned a coppery colour, then that part of its surface which was not yet shadowed grew grey and ashen, and at length its mountains and plains were to be seen glowing luridly through a crimson gloom.

On, yet on, crept the ring of darkness; it was now more than half across the blood-red orb. The air grew thick, and the light dimmer, till we could scarcely see the fierce faces of the group before us.

"The moon is dying—the white wizards have killed the moon," yelled the prince Scragga at last. "We shall all perish in the dark" and he lifted his spear and drove it with all his force at Sir Henry's breast. But he had forgotten the mail shirt. The steel bounded off harmlessly, and before he could repeat the blow Sir Henry had snatched the spear from his hand and sent it straight through him. Scragga dropped dead.

At the sight, the companies of girls ran screeching for the gateways. The king himself, followed by his guards, some of the chiefs, and Gagool, fled for the huts. Foulata, Infadoos, and many chiefs were left alone upon the scene, together with the dead body of Scragga.

"Chiefs," I said, "we have given you the sign. If ye are satisfied let us fly swiftly."

"Come," said Infadoos, turning to go. Holding each other by the hand we stumbled on through the darkness.

CHAPTER XI

BEFORE THE BATTLE

FOR an hour or more we journeyed on, till at length the eclipse began to pass. We then discovered that we were clear of the town of Loo and approaching a large flat-topped hill. This was not very high; but it was shaped like a horseshoe, its steep sides strewn with boulders. As we toiled up the slope in the returning moonlight we saw that there were several regiments upon the grassy table-land at the top.

Passing through these without a word, we reached a hut in the centre of the ground, where we were astonished to find our few belongings, which of course we had had to leave behind in our hasty flight.

"I sent for them," explained Infadoos; "also for these," and he lifted up Good's long-lost trousers.

Good sprang at them, and instantly proceeded to put them on.

"Surely my lord will not hide his beautiful white legs!" exclaimed Infadoos.

But Good insisted, and once only did the Kukuana people get the chance of seeing his beautiful legs again. They had to be content with his one whisker, his transparent eye, and his movable teeth.

When the sun was up, the troops—nearly twenty thousand men—were formed up on a large open space, to which we went.

After silence had been proclaimed, Infadoos addressed them. He told them the history of Ignosi's father, and of how he had been murdered by Twala

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the king, and his wife and child driven out to starve. But now, he said, the white lords had taken Ignosi by the hand and brought him over the mountains. They were prepared to assist them to overthrow Twala, and set up the rightful king, Ignosi, in his place.

Then Ignosi stepped forward and began to speak. He ended a powerful speech in these words:

"O chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people, ye have heard my words. I am indeed the king, and if ye stand by my side in the battle and I win the day, ye shall go with me to victory and honour. If ye fall, I will fall with you.

"And, behold, I give you this promise, that when I sit upon the throne, bloodshed shall cease in the land. No longer shall ye cry for justice, no longer shall the witch-finder hunt you out. No man shall die unless he offends against the laws. Have ye chosen, chiefs, captains, soldiers, and people?"

"We have chosen, O king," came back the answer.

"It is well. Now go to your huts and make ready for war."

There was a pause, till presently one of the chiefs lifted his hand, and out rolled the royal salute, "*Koom!*" It was a sign that the soldiers accepted Ignosi as their king. Then they marched off in battalions.

Half an hour afterwards we held a council of war. We had on our side about twenty thousand men, composed of seven of the best regiments in the country. Twala, so Infadoos and the chiefs calculated, had at least thirty to thirty-five thousand at present in Loo, and they thought that by midday on the morrow he would be able to gather another five thousand or more.

Meanwhile, we set to work to strengthen the position in all ways possible. The paths up the hill were care-

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fully blocked with masses of stones. Piles of boulders were collected at various spots to be rolled down upon an advancing enemy, and the whole position was made as safe and secure as man's work could make it.

At last, an hour after midnight, everything that could be done was done, and the camp, except for the occasional challenge of a sentry, sank into silence. Sir Henry and I, accompanied by Ignosi and one of the chiefs, descended the hill and made a round of the outposts. After this we went to sleep for a couple of hours.

Just about dawn we were awakened by Infadoos, who came to say that great activity was to be observed in Loo, and that parties of the king's troops were approaching.

We got up and dressed ourselves for the fray, each putting on his chain armour shirt. Sir Henry dressed himself like a native warrior. Round his throat he fastened the leopard-skin cloak of a commanding officer, on his brows he bound the plume of black ostrich feathers worn only by generals of high rank, and about his middle a magnificent *moocha* of white ox-tails. A pair of sandals, a leglet of goat's hair, a heavy battle-axe, with a rhinoceros-horn handle, a round iron shield covered with white ox-hide, and a number of *tollas*, or throwing-knives, made up his equipment, to which, however, he added his revolver.

As for Good and myself, the armour did not suit us nearly so well. To begin with, Good insisted upon keeping on his new-found trousers. A stout, short gentleman with an eye-glass, and one half of his face shaved, arrayed in a mail shirt, carefully tucked into a very seedy pair of corduroys, looks more remarkable than imposing. In my case, the chain shirt being too big for me, I put it on over all my clothes. I put off my trousers,

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however, having determined to go into battle with bare legs in order to be the lighter for running. The mail coat, a spear, a shield, a couple of *tollas*, a revolver, and a huge plume pinned into the top of my shooting hat, completed my equipment. In addition we had our rifles, but as ammunition was scarce, we arranged that they should be carried behind us by bearers.

When at length we were dressed, we swallowed some food hastily, and then started out to see how things were going on. We found Infadoos surrounded by his own regiment, the Greys. This regiment, now three thousand five hundred strong, was being held in reserve, and the men were lying down on the grass in companies, and watching the king's forces creep out of Loo in long ant-like columns. There seemed to be no end to the length of these columns—three in all, and each of them numbering at least eleven or twelve thousand men.

As soon as they were clear of the town the regiments formed up. Then one body marched off to the right, one to the left, and the third came on slowly towards us.

"Ah," said Infadoos, "so they are going to attack us on three sides at once."

CHAPTER XII

THE ATTACK

SLOWLY the three columns crept on. When the main or centre column was within about five hundred yards of us, the men halted at the root of a tongue of open plain which ran up into the hill, to give time for the other divisions to get round to the flank. In this way the threefold assault could be delivered at the same moment.

There was a pause, and then there came an ominous roar from our far right, and a similar roar on our left. The two other divisions were engaging us.

At the sound, the mass of men before us opened out a little, and advanced towards the hill at a slow trot. We kept up a steady fire from our rifles as they came, and accounted for several men, but of course we produced no effect upon that mighty rush.

On they came, with a shout and the clashing of spears; now they were driving in the outposts we had placed among the rocks at the foot of the hill. After that the advance was a little slower, for it was up hill, and they came slowly to save their breath. Our first line of defence was about half-way down the side of the slope, our second fifty yards farther back, while our third was on the edge of the plateau.

On they stormed, shouting their war cry, "*Twala! Twala! Chiele! Chiele!*" ("Twala! Twala! Smite! Smite!") "*Ignosi! Ignosi! Chiele! Chiele!*" answered our people. They were quite close now, and the *tollas* began to flash backwards and forwards. Then with an awful yell the battle closed in.

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To and fro swayed the mass of struggling men; our first line of defence was slowly pressed back, till it merged into the second. Here the struggle was very fierce, but again our people were driven back and up. At length, within twenty minutes of the start of the fighting, our third line came into action.

For a while the savages swung backwards and forwards, in the fierce ebb and flow of battle. Sir Henry watched the struggle and then without a word rushed off, followed by Good, and flung himself into the hottest of the fray. As for myself, I stopped where I was.

The soldiers caught sight of his tall form as he plunged into the battle, and there rose a cry of—

"Nanzia, Incubu! Nanzia Unkungunklova!" ("Here is the Elephant!") *"Chiele! Chiele!"*

Inch by inch, the attacking force was pressed back down the hillside, till at last it retreated in confusion. At that instant, too, a messenger arrived to say that the left attack had been repulsed; and I was just beginning to breathe again, when, to our horror, we saw our men on the right being driven towards us across the plain, followed by swarms of the enemy.

Ignosi gave a word of command to the Greys, and in another second I found myself involved in a furious attack upon the advancing foe. I made the best of a bad job, and toddled along to be killed as though I liked it. In a minute or two we were plunging through the flying groups of our men, who at once began to re-form behind us, and then I am sure I do not know what happened. All I can remember is a dreadful noise of the meeting of shields. Somebody knocked me down, and I remembered no more. •

When I came to I found myself back on the hill, with Good bending over me holding some water in a gourd.

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"How do you feel, old fellow?" he asked anxiously. I got up and shook myself before replying.

"Pretty well, thank you," I answered. "How has it ended?"

"They are driven back at every point for a while. Casualties are dreadfully heavy; we have quite two thousand killed and wounded, and they must have lost three."

At this moment we were joined by Sir Henry, who still held a battle-axe in his hand, Ignosi, Infadoos, and one or two of the chiefs.

"Thank Heaven, here you are, Quatermain! I can't quite make out what Ignosi wants to do. It seems that though we have beaten off the attack, Twala looks like trying to starve us out."

"That's awkward."

"Yes; especially as Infadoos says that the water supply has given out."

"My lord, that is so," said Infadoos; "the spring is failing rapidly. Before night we shall all be thirsty. Listen, Macumazahn. Thou art wise. Now tell us, what shall we do? Incubu, the great warrior says 'Charge'; but the Elephant is ever prone to charge. Now what says Macumazahn, the wily old fox? The last word is with Ignosi the king, for it is a king's right to speak of war; but let us hear thy voice, O Macumazahn."

"Well," I said, "I too think we should attack at once, before our wounds grow stiff."

At length, after deep thought, Ignosi spoke.

"Brave white men, and my friends: Infadoos, my uncle, and chiefs; my heart is fixed. I will strike at Twala this day. Listen; thus while I strike. Ye see how the hill curves round like the half-moon, and how the plain runs like a green tongue towards us within the curve?"

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"We see," I answered.

"Good; it is now midday, and the men eat and rest after the toil of battle. When the sun has travelled a little way, let thy regiment, my uncle, advance with one other down to the green tongue; and when Twala sees it he will hurl his force at it to crush it. But the spot is narrow, and the regiments can come one at a time only; so they may be destroyed one by one, and the eyes of all Twala's army shall be fixed upon the struggle. With thee, my uncle, shall go Incubu my friend. And I will come with the second regiment; and with me shall come Macumazahn the wise."

"It is well, O king," said Infadoos.

"And whilst the eyes of Twala's soldiers are fixed upon the fight," went on Ignosi, "behold, one-third of the men who are left alive to us shall creep along the right horn of the hill and fall upon the left flank of Twala's force. And one-third shall creep along the left horn and fall upon Twala's right flank. Then will I, with the men who remain, charge in Twala's face, and if fortune goes with us the day will be ours."

Within little more than an hour the three divisions were formed, the scheme was explained to the leaders, and the whole force was ready.

Presently Good came up to Sir Henry and myself.

"Good-bye, you fellows," he said; "I am off with the right wing; and so I have come to shake hands, just in case."

We shook hands in silence. Then Good was gone; and Infadoos came up and led off Sir Henry to his place with the Greys, whilst I departed with Ignosi to my station in the second attacking regiment.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST STAND OF THE GREYS

HALF an hour or more was allowed to elapse between the setting out of the horns or wings of the army before any stir was made by the Greys and their supporting regiment, known as the Buffaloes, which were to bear the worst of the battle.

Both of these regiments were fresh, and full of strength, the Greys having been in reserve in the morning. As for the Buffaloes, they had formed the third line of defence on the left, and had scarcely come into action at all.

At last the Greys filed off in three lines, each line containing about one thousand fighting men. When the last companies had advanced some five hundred yards, Ignosi put himself at the head of the Buffaloes and gave the word to march, and off we went.

By the time that we reached the edge of the plateau the Greys were already half-way down the slope. It ended in the tongue of grass land that ran up into the bend of the mountain. The excitement in Twala's camp was very great, and regiment after regiment was moving at a long swinging trot towards the same tongue of land.

This tongue, which was some three hundred yards in depth, even at its root or widest part was not more than four hundred and fifty paces across, while at its tip it scarcely measured ninety. The Greys, who in passing down the side of the hill had formed into column, on reaching the spot where it broadened out again, formed again into three lines and halted dead.

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Then we—that is, the Buffaloes—moved down the tip of the tongue and took our stand in reserve, about one hundred yards behind the last line of the Greys, and on slightly higher ground. Meanwhile Twala's entire force, some forty thousand, was moving swiftly up towards us. But as they drew near the root of the tongue they discovered that only one regiment could advance into the gorge at a time. And there stood the famous regiment of Greys, ready to hold the way against their forces as the three Romans once held the bridge against thousands.

They hesitated, and finally stopped their advance. Presently, however, a tall general appeared, being (I thought) none other than Twala himself. He gave an order, and the first regiment, raising a shout, charged up towards the Greys. They remained perfectly still and silent till the attacking troops were within forty yards and a volley of *tollas* came rattling among their ranks.

Then suddenly, with a bound and a roar, they sprang forward with uplifted spears, and the regiments met. The roll of the meeting shields came to our ears like the sound of thunder, and the plain seemed to be alive with shimmering spears. To and fro swung the battle, but not for long. Suddenly the attacking lines began to grow thinner, and then with a slow, long heave the Greys passed over them, just like a great wave. The regiment was completely destroyed, but the Greys had only two lines left now; a third of their number were dead.

Closing up once more they halted in silence and awaited attack; and I caught sight of Sir Henry's yellow beard as he moved to and fro. So he was still alive!

But now a second regiment, with white plumes, kilts and shields, was moving to the attack of the two thousand remaining Greys, who stood waiting in the same

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silence as before. Again there came the awful roll of the meeting shields. It seemed for a while almost impossible that the Greys should again prevail. The attacking regiment, which was formed of young men, seemed by sheer weight to be driving the veterans back.

Just when we thought that it was all over with the Greys, and were preparing to take their place, I heard Sir Henry's voice ringing out through the din. Then came a change; the Greys ceased to give; they stood still as a rock. Presently they began to move once more—forward this time.

Suddenly, like puffs of smoke, the attacking regiment broke away in flying groups, their white headdresses streaming behind them in the wind. Of the Greys there remained at most some six hundred men; the rest were underfoot. And yet they cheered and waved their spears in triumph. Then they ran forward, for a hundred yards or so, took possession of a small mound, and formed a triple ring around it. There, thank Heaven, I saw Sir Henry, apparently unharmed, and with him our old friend Infadoos. But then Twala's regiments rolled down upon them, and once more the battle raged.

I could bear it no longer. "Are we to stand here till we put out roots, Ignosi, while Twala swallows our brothers yonder?" I asked.

"Nay, Macumazahn," was the answer; "see, now is the moment!"

As he spoke, a fresh regiment rushed past the ring upon the little mound, and wheeling round, attacked it from the near side.

Then, lifting his battle-axe, Ignosi gave the signal to advance, and, raising the Kukuara war-cry, the Buffaloes charged home with a rush like the rush of the sea.

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All I can remember is a wild yet steady advance, that seemed to shake the ground; then an awful shock, a dull roar of voices, and a continuous flashing of spears, seen through a red mist.

When my mind was clear again, I found myself standing inside the remnant of the Greys near the top of the mound, and just behind Sir Henry himself. How I got there I had no idea; but Sir Henry afterwards told me that I was carried by the first furious charge of the Buffaloes almost to his feet, and then left behind as they in turn were pressed back. He had dashed out of the circle and dragged me into it.

As for the fight that followed, who can describe it? Again and again the enemy charged against our little circle, and again and again we beat them back.

It was a gallant sight to see that old warrior, Infadoos, shouting out orders, and even jests, to keep up the spirit of his few remaining men. And yet more gallant was the vision of Sir Henry, whose long yellow hair now streamed out in the breeze behind him. There he stood, the great Dane, and none could live before his stroke. Time after time I saw his axe sweeping down, till at last none would come near the great white wizard.

But suddenly there rose a cry of "*Twala, y' Twala*," and out of the crowd sprang the one-eyed king himself, also armed with battle-axe and shield, and clothed in chain armour.

"Where art thou, Incubu, thou white man, who slewest Scragga my son—see if thou canst slay me!" he shouted and at the same time hurled a *tolla* straight at Sir Henry. He fortunately saw it coming, and caught it on his shield.

Then, with a cry, Twala leapt straight at him, and with his battle-axe struck him such a blow upon the

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shield that the shock of it brought Sir Henry down upon his knees.

At that very moment there rose from the enemy troops a shout of dismay, and on looking up I saw the cause.

To the right and to the left our squadrons had come to our relief. The time could not have been better chosen. All Twala's army had fixed their eyes on the struggle with the remnant of the Greys and the Buffaloes. And now our reserves had leapt, like greyhounds, on their flanks.

In five minutes the battle was decided. Twala and his regiments broke into flight, and soon the plain was scattered with groups of running soldiers. In a moment we were left standing like a rock from which the sea has retreated. But what a sight it was! Of the gallant Greys there remained but ninety-five men upon their feet. More than three thousand four hundred had fallen in this one regiment.

"Men," said Infadoos calmly, as he bound up a wound in his arm, "ye have kept up the reputation of your regiment, and this day's fighting will be spoken of by your children's children." Then he turned round and shook Sir Henry Curtis by the hand. "Thou art a great man, Incubu," he said simply; "I have lived a long life among warriors, yet have I never seen a man like thee."

At this moment the Buffaloes began to march past us on the road to Loo. As they went, a message was brought to us from Ignosi asking Infadoos, Sir Henry, Good and myself to join him. When we did so, he informed us that he was pressing on to Loo to complete the victory by capturing Twala, if that was possible.

Taking precautions against treachery, we marched on into the town. All along the roadways stood warriors,

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their heads drooping, and their shields and spears at their feet, who, as Ignosi passed, saluted him as king. On we marched, straight to Twala's kraal. When we reached the great space, we found it deserted. No, not quite deserted, for there, on the farther side, in front of his hut, sat Twala himself, with but one attendant—Gagool.

There he sat, with his battle-axe and shield by his side, and his chin upon his breast.

When within about fifty yards of him the regiment was halted; and we advanced accompanied only by a small guard. As we drew near, Twala, for the first time, lifted his plumed head, and fixed his one eye upon his rival—Ignosi.

"Hail, O king!" he said, with bitter mockery. "What fate hast thou for me, O king?"

"The fate thou gavest to my father, whose throne thou hast sat on these many years!" was the stern answer.

"It is good. I am ready to die, but I beg the right of the Kukuana royal House to die fighting. Thou canst not refuse it."

"It is granted. Choose—with whom wilt thou fight? Myself I cannot fight with thee, for the king fights not except in war."

Twala's eye ran up and down our ranks. Presently he spoke.

"Incubu, what sayest thou, shall we end what we began today, or shall I call thee a coward?"

"Nay," interrupted Ignosi; "thou shalt not fight with Incubu."

"Not if he is afraid," said Twala.

Sir Henry took a pace towards Twala. "I will fight him," he said; "he shall see if I am afraid."

"It is well, Incubu," said Ignosi at last, "thou art a

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brave man. It will be a good fight. Behold, Twala, the Elephant is ready for thee."

The ex-king laughed savagely, and stepping forward faced Curtis. Then they began to circle round each other, their battle-axes raised.

Suddenly Sir Henry sprang forward and struck a fearful blow at Twala, who stepped to one side. So heavy was the stroke that Sir Henry half overbalanced himself. At once Twala circled his battle-axe round his head and brought it down with tremendous force. My heart jumped into my mouth; I thought that the fight was already over. But no; with a quick movement Sir Henry put his shield between himself and the axe. Its outer edge was cut away, and the axe fell on his left shoulder, but not heavily enough to do any serious damage. In another moment Sir Henry got in a second blow, which was also caught by Twala upon his shield. Then followed blow upon blow. The excitement grew intense.

Presently Sir Henry, having caught a fresh stroke upon his shield, hit out with all his force. The blow cut through Twala's shield and through the tough chain armour behind it, gashing him in the shoulder. With a yell of pain Twala returned the blow and slashed right through the handle of his enemy's battle-axe, wounding Curtis in the face.

A cry rose from the Buffaloes as his axe-head fell useless to the ground; and Twala, again raising his weapon, flew at him with a shout. I shut my eyes. When I opened them again I saw Sir Henry with his great arms twined round Twala's middle. To and fro they swung, hugging each other like bears, straining for dear life. With a mighty effort Twala swung the Englishman clean off his feet, and down they came together, rolling

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over and over on the ground. Twala was striking at Curtis' head with the battle-axe, and Sir Henry trying to drive the *tolla* he had drawn from his belt through Twala's armour.

"Get his axe!" yelled Good; and perhaps our hero heard him.

At any rate, dropping the *tolla*, he snatched at the axe, which was fastened to Twala's wrist. Still rolling over and over, they fought for it like wild cats, drawing their breath in heavy gasps. Suddenly the fastening burst; and then, with a great effort, Sir Henry freed himself, the weapon in his hand. In another second he was upon his feet, and so was Twala. Drawing the heavy *tolla* from his belt, he staggered straight at Curtis and struck him upon the breast. The stab came home true and strong, but the chain armour withstood the steel. Again Twala struck out with a savage yell. Again the sharp knife rebounded, though Sir Henry went staggering back. Once more Twala came on, and as he came the Englishman gathered himself together, and swinging the big axe round his head, hit with all his force. There was a shriek of excitement from a thousand throats, for Twala's head seemed to spring from his shoulders: then it fell and came rolling and bounding along the ground towards Ignosi, stopping just at his feet. As it did so Sir Henry, weak with loss of blood, fell heavily across the body of the dead king.

In a second he was lifted up, and eager hands were pouring water on his face. Another minute and the grey eyes opened wide.

He was not dead.

Then I, just as the sun sank, stepped to where Twala's head lay in the dust, unfastened the diamond from his forehead, and handed it to Ignosi.

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"Take it," I said, "lawful king of the Kukuanas—king by birth and victory."

Ignosi bound the diadem upon himself. Then, advancing, he placed his foot upon the chest of his foe and broke into a great chant of triumph.

"Now," he began, "*now is our rebellion swallowed up in victory.*"

"In the morning the oppressors arose and shook themselves; they bound on their plumes and made them ready to war.

"Their plumes covered the earth as the plumes of a bird cover her nest; they shook their spears and shouted, yea, they hurled their spears into the sunlight; they lusted for the battle and were glad.

"They came up against me; their strong ones ran swiftly to slay me; they cried 'Ha! ha! he is as one already dead.'

"Then breathed I on them, and my breath was as the breath of a storm, and lo! they were not.

"My lightnings pierced them; I licked up their strength with the lightning of my spears; I shook them to the earth with the thunder of my shouting.

"They broke—they scattered—they were gone as the mists of the morning.

"They are food for the crows and the foxes, and the place of battle is fat with their blood.

"Where are the mighty ones who rose up in the morning?

"Where are the proud ones who tossed their plumes and cried, 'He is as one already dead'?

"They bow their heads, but not in sleep; they are stretched out, but not in sleep.

"And I—I the king!—like an eagle I have found my eyrie.

"Creep ye under the shadow of my wings, O people, and I will comfort you, and ye shall not be dismayed.

"Mine are the cattle in the valleys, mine also are the riches in the kraals.

"The winter is overpast, the summer is come. Rejoice, rejoice, my people!

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"Let all the world rejoice that tyranny is trodden down, and that I am the king."

When at length he ceased, out of the dusk came back the deep reply—

"Thou art the king!"

CHAPTER XIV

GOOD FALLS SICK

AFTER the fight was ended, Sir Henry and Good were carried into Twala's hut, where I joined them. They were both utterly exhausted and indeed my own condition was little better. Also my head was aching violently from the blow I had received in the morning, when I was knocked senseless.

Somehow, with the help of Foulata (who, ever since we had saved her life, had become our loyal servant) we managed to get off the chain shirts. We found that the flesh underneath was terribly hurt, for though the steel links had kept the weapons from entering, they had not prevented them from bruising. As a remedy Foulata brought us an ointment made of sweet green leaves, which eased the pain a good deal.

But the worst problems were Sir Henry's and Good's wounds. Good had a hole right through the fleshy part of his leg, and Sir Henry had a deep cut over the jaw from Twala's battle-axe. Good brought out his small box of medicines and managed to stitch up first Sir Henry's and then his own wound pretty well. Afterwards he smeared on some antiseptic ointment, of which there was a pot in the little box, and we covered them with two halves of a pocket-handkerchief.

Meanwhile Foulata had prepared us some strong broth. This we swallowed, and then threw ourselves on the piles of magnificent fur rugs, which were scattered about the dead king's hut.

After that day's work, sleep was difficult. But at last,

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somehow or other, the night passed away. When dawn broke, I found Good was in a high fever. Very soon he began to grow light-headed, and also, to my alarm, to spit blood. Sir Henry, however, seemed pretty fresh, though he was so sore and stiff that he could scarcely move.

In the course of the morning, we had a short visit from Ignosi.

"Hail, O king!" I said, rising.

"Yes, Macumazahn. King at last, by the might of your three right hands," was the ready answer.

All was, he said, going on well; and he hoped to arrange a great feast in two weeks' time in order to show himself to the people.

I asked him what he had settled to do with Gagool.

"She is the evil genius of the land," he answered, "and I shall kill her, and all the witch-doctors with her!"

"Yet she knows much," I replied; "it is easier to destroy knowledge, Ignosi, than to gather it."

"That is so," he said thoughtfully.

"She knows too where the diamonds are. Forget not thy promise, Ignosi; thou must lead us to the mines, even if thou hast to spare Gagool alive to show the way."

"I will not forget, Macumazahn."

After Ignosi's visit I went to see Good, and found his fever much worse. For four or five days his condition was very serious; indeed, I believe firmly that without Foulata's nursing he would have died. Day and night she watched him and tended him, giving him his only medicine, a native drink made of milk, and keeping the flies from settling on him. Yet for two days we thought that he must die, and crept about with heavy hearts.

Only Foulata would not believe it.

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"He will live," she said.

One night, the fifth of Good's illness, I went across to see how he was getting on before turning in for a few hours.

I entered the hut carefully. The lamp placed upon the floor showed the figure of Good lying quite still.

So it had happened at last! I gave something like a sob.

"Hush-h-h!" came from the patch of dark shadow behind Good's head.

Then, creeping closer, I saw that he was not dead, but sleeping soundly, with Foulata's fingers clasped tightly in his hand. The crisis had passed, and he would live. He slept like that for eighteen hours; but when he woke, his recovery was rapid and complete.

It was a few days after this last occurrence that Ignosi held his great "*indaba*", or council, and was acclaimed as king by the head men of Kukuanaland.

When the ceremony was over we spoke to Ignosi, and informed him that we were now anxious to investigate the mines to which Solomon's Road ran.

"There is but one who can show them to thee—Gagool."

"And if she will not?"

"Then she must die," said Ignosi sternly. "I have saved her alive for this. Stay, she shall choose," and calling to a messenger he ordered Gagool to be brought before him.

In a few minutes she came, hurried along by two guards, whom she was cursing as she walked.

"Leave her," said the king to the guards.

'So soon as they did so, the withered old bundle sank in a heap on to the floor.

"What is your will, Ignosi?" she piped. "Ye dare not

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touch me. If ye touch me I will slay you as ye sit. Beware of my magic."

"Thy magic could not save Twala, old she-wolf, and it cannot hurt me," was the answer. "Listen; I will this, that thou reveal to us the chamber where are the shining stones."

"Ha! ha!" she piped, "none know its secret but I, and I will never tell thee. The white devils shall go empty-handed."

"Thou shalt tell me. I will make thee tell me."

"How, O king? Thou art great, but can thy power wring the truth from a woman?"

"It is difficult, yet will I do it."

"How, O king?"

"Nay, thus; if thou tellest not thou shalt slowly die."

"Die!" she shrieked in terror and fury; "ye dare not touch me—man, ye know not who I am. How old think ye am I? I knew your fathers, and your fathers' fathers' fathers. When the country was young I was here; when the country grows old I shall still be here. I cannot die unless I be killed by chance, for none dare slay me."

"Cease thy talk and answer me," said Ignosi angrily. "Wilt thou show the place where the stones are, or wilt thou not? If thou wilt not, thou diest even now," and he seized a spear and held it over her.

"I will not show it; thou darest not kill me!"

Slowly Ignosi brought down the spear till it pricked the heap of rags.

With a wild yell Gagool sprang to her feet, then fell again and rolled upon the floor.

"Nay, I will show it. Only let me live, let me sit in the sun and have a bit of meat to suck, and I will show thee."

"It is well. Tomorrow shalt thou go with Infadoos

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and my white brothers to the place, and if thou showest it not, then thou shalt slowly die. I have spoken."

"I will not fail, Ignosi. I always keep my word—*ha! ha! ha!* Once before a woman showed the chamber to a white man, and evil befell him," and here her eyes glinted. "Her name was Gagool also. Perchance I was that woman."

"Thou liest," I said, "that was ten generations ago."

"Maybe, maybe; when one lives long one forgets. Perhaps it was my mother's mother who told me, surely her name was Gagool also. But ye will find in the place where the bright stones are a bag of hide full of them. The man filled that bag but he never took it away. Evil befell him, evil befell him! Perhaps it was my mother's mother who told me. It will be a merry journey. *Ha! ha! ha!*"

CHAPTER XV

THE PLACE OF DEATH

ON the third day after this we camped in some huts at the foot of the "Three Witches", as the triangle of mountains were called to which Solomon's Great Road ran. Our party consisted of our three selves; Foulata, who waited on us; Infadoos; Gagool, who was carried in a litter, muttering and cursing all day long; and a party of guards and attendants. The mountains were, as I have said, in the form of a triangle, one peak being on our right, one on our left, and one straight in front of us. Beneath the snow-line the peaks were purple with heather, and so were the moors that ran up the slopes towards them. Straight before us, Solomon's Great Road stretched away uphill to the foot of the centre peak, about five miles from us, and there stopped. It was its terminus.

It was a bright and sunlit morning as we tramped on up the heather-fringed way, going so fast in our excitement that the bearers of Gagool's litter could scarcely keep pace with us.

Quite suddenly we saw before us, and between ourselves and the peak, a vast circular hole with sloping sides, three hundred feet or more in depth, and quite half a mile round.

"Can't you guess what this is?" I said to Sir Henry and Good, who were staring in astonishment.

They shook their heads.

"Then you can never have seen the diamond diggings at Kimberley. You may depend on it that this is Solomon's Diamond Mine."

THE PLACE OF DEATH

At the edge of this vast hole the Great Road branched into two parts and passed round it. We were curious to see what the three objects were which lay on the further side of the great gulf, so we pressed on. As we drew nearer we perceived that they were the three "Silent Ones" that are held in such awe by the Kukuana people.

There, upon huge pedestals of dark rock, were three colossal statues—two male and one female—each measuring about eighteen feet from the crown of its head to the pedestal.

The female had a crescent moon upon her head. The two males had terrifying expressions, especially the one to our right, which had the face of a devil. The one to our left was more human, but the calm upon it was dreadful. These three statues sit there in their solitude, and gaze out across the plain for ever.

While we were still looking at them, Infadoos came up and asked us if we were ready to go on at once. If so, Gagool was willing to guide us. As it was not later than eleven o'clock we said we would leave at once, and I suggested that we should take some food with us. So Gagool's litter was brought up, and she was helped out of it. Meanwhile, Foulata packed up some dried meat and a couple of gourds of water in a reed basket. Straight in front of us rose a sheer wall of rock, eighty feet or more in height. As soon as she was clear of her hammock, Gagool cast an evil grin at us, and then, leaning on a stick, hobbled off towards the face of this wall. We followed her till we came to a narrow arched entrance that looked like the opening of a gallery of a mine.

Here Gagool was waiting for us, still with that evil grin upon her horrid face.

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"Now, white men from the Stars," she piped; "great warriors, Incubu, Bougwan, and Macumazahn the wise, are ye ready?"

"We are ready," I said.

"Good! good! Make strong your hearts to bear what ye shall see. Come on, come on, here is the lamp," and she drew a large gourd, full of oil and fitted with a rush wick from under her fur cloak.

"Art thou also coming, Foulata?" asked Good.

"Yes, my lord," the girl answered timidly. "I will bear the basket."

Without further ado Gagool plunged into the passage, which was wide enough to allow two to walk abreast, and quite dark. We followed the sound of her voice as she piped to us to come on.

"Hullo! what's that?" halloosed Good suddenly; "somebody hit me in the face."

"It's only bats," said I; "on you go."

When we had gone some fifty paces, we could see that the passage was growing light. Another minute, and we were in the most wonderful place I have ever seen.

Imagine a vast cathedral, windowless, but dimly lighted from above, with its roof arching a hundred feet above your head, and you will get some idea of the size of the enormous cave in which we found ourselves, with the difference that this cathedral designed by nature was loftier and wider than any built by man. But the enormous size of this cave was the least of its wonders, for running in rows down its length were gigantic pillars of what looked like ice, but were really huge stalactites. Some of them were not less than twenty feet in diameter at the base, and sprang up sheer to the distant roof. Others again were still unfinished. On the rock floor there was what looked like a broken column, whilst high

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overhead the point of a huge icicle could be dimly seen. Even as we gazed, we could hear the process going on, for presently with a tiny splash a drop of water would fall from the far-off icicle on to the column below.

Sometimes the "columns" took strange forms, where the dropping of the water had not always been on the same spot. One huge mass, which must have weighed a hundred tons or so, was in the shape of a pulpit, with a surface that looked like lacc. Others were like strange beasts. But we had not time to examine this cavern thoroughly for Gagool seemed anxious to get ahead.

On she led us, straight to the top of the vast and silent cave, where we found another doorway, not arched like the first, but square at the top.

"Are ye prepared to enter the Place of Death, White Men?" asked Gagool, evidently hoping to make us feel uncomfortable.

"Lead on," said Good solemnly.

Tap, tap, went old Gagool's stick down the passage, as she trotted off again, chuckling hideously; but, overcome by some sense of evil, I hung back.

"Come on, old fellow," said Good, "or we shall lose our fair guide."

Then I started down the passage, and after about twenty paces found myself in a gloomy space some forty feet long, by thirty broad, and thirty high, which in some past age had been hollowed, by hand-labour, out of the mountain. It was not nearly so well lighted as the vast stalactite cave, and at the first glance all I could see was a heavy stone table running down its length with a colossal white figure at its head, and white figures all round it. Next I spotted a brown thing, seated on the table in the centre. In another moment my eyes grew accustomed to the light, and I saw what all these

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things were, and turned to run out of the place as hard as my legs would carry me.

But Sir Henry held me tight, so I stopped because I could not help myself. Next second, however, *his* eyes became used to the light and he let go of me, and began to mop his forehead. As for Good, he swore feebly, while Foulata threw her arms round his neck and shrieked.

Only Gagool chuckled loud and long.

It *was* a ghastly sight. There at the end of the long stone table, holding in his skeleton fingers a great white spear, sat *Death* himself, a colossal human skeleton, fifteen feet or more in height. High above his head he held the spear, as though in the act to strike; one bony hand rested on the stone table before him, whilst his body was bent forward, the jaws a little open, as though it were about to speak.

"*Hee! hee! hee!*" laughed Gagool. "To those who enter the Hall of the Dead, evil comes. *Hee! hee! hee!*"

Presently she stooped and pointed at the brown object seated on the table. Sir Henry looked and started back, and no wonder, for there was Twala, the last king of the Kukuanas. On his dark skin there was a thin glassy film, and we then saw that from the roof of the chamber the water fell steadily, *drip! drop! drip!* on to the neck of the corpse. It ran down over the entire surface, and finally escaped into the rock through a tiny hole in the table. *Twala's body was being transformed into a stalactite.*

A look at the white forms seated round the table proved it. They were human bodies indeed, or rather they had been human; now they were *stalactites*. "This was the way in which the Kukuana people had preserved their dead kings.

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But the colossal Death, who sits at the head of the table, is far older than these, and, unless I am much mistaken, was made by the same artist who designed the three Colossi. He is hewn out of a single stalactite, and Good declared that, so far as he could see, the skeleton is perfect down to the smallest bones.

Such, at any rate, was the White Death and such were the White Dead!

CHAPTER XVI

SOLOMON'S TREASURE CHAMBER

"Now, Gagool," said I, in a low voice—somehow one did not dare to speak above a whisper in that place—"lead us to the chamber."

"My lords are not afraid?" she said, leering up into my face.

"Lead on."

"Good, my lords"; and she hobbled round to the back of the great Death. "Here is the chamber; let my lords light the lamp, and enter," and she placed the gourd full of oil upon the floor, and leaned herself against the side of the cave. I took out a match, of which we had still a few in a box, and lit a rush wick, and then looked for the doorway, but there was nothing before us, except the solid rock. Gagool grinned. "The way is there, my lords."

"Do not joke with us," I said sternly.

"Nay, my lords. See!" and she pointed at the rock.

As she did so, we saw that a mass of stone was rising slowly from the floor and vanishing into the rock above. The mass was as wide as a good-sized door, about ten feet high and not less than five feet thick. It must have weighed at least twenty or thirty tons. How it was set in motion, of course none of us saw; Gagool was careful to avoid this; but I have little doubt that there was some very simple lever, which was moved ever so little by pressure on a secret spot.

Very slowly and gently the great stone raised itself, and a dark hole stood in the place which the door had filled.

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"Enter, white men from the Stars," said Gagool, advancing into the doorway; "but first hear your servant, Gagool the old. The bright stones that ye will see were dug out of the pit which the Silent Ones guard and stored here, I know not by whom. But those who stored the stones departed in haste, leaving them behind. Among the people who lived in the country none knew where the chamber was, nor the secret of the door. But it happened that a white man reached this country from over the mountains—perchance he too came 'from the Stars'—and was well received by the king of that time. And it came to pass that he and a woman journeyed to this place, and that by chance the woman learnt the secret of the door. Then the white man entered with the woman, and found the stones, and filled with stones the skin of a small goat, which the woman had with her to hold food. And as he was going from the chamber he took up one more stone, a large one, and held it in his hand." Here she paused.

"Well," I asked, "what happened to Da Silvestra?"

The old hag started.

"How knowest thou the dead man's name?" she asked sharply; and then, without waiting for an answer, went on—

"None know what happened; but the white man was frightened, for he flung down the goat-skin, with the stones, and fled out with only the one stone in his hand. And that is the stone which thou, Macumazahn, didst take from Twala's brow."

"Have none entered here since?" I asked, peering again down the dark passage.

"None, my lords. Enter now. If I speak truth, the goat-skin with the stones will lie upon the floor; and if indeed it is death to enter here, that will ye learn

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afterwards. *Ha! ha! ha!*" and she hobbled through the doorway, bearing the light with her.

"Oh, confound it all!" said Good; "here goes. I am not going to be frightened by that old devil"; and followed by Foulata, who was by now shivering with fear, he plunged into the passage after Gagool—an example which we quickly followed.

A few yards down the passage, in the narrow way hewn out of the living rock, Gagool had paused, and was waiting for us.

"See, my lords," she said, holding the light before her, "those who stored the treasure here fled in haste. They meant to guard against any who should find the secret of the door, but had not the time," and she pointed to large square blocks of stone, which had been placed across the passage with a view to walling it up. Along the side of the passage were other blocks ready for use, and, most curious of all, a heap of mortar and a couple of trowels.

Just then Foulata cried out that she felt faint and could go no further, but would wait there. Accordingly we set her down on the unfinished wall, and left her to recover.

Following the passage for about fifteen paces farther, we came suddenly to a painted wooden door, standing wide open. *Across the threshold of this door lay a goat-skin bag that appeared to be full of pebbles.*

"*Hee! Hee!* white men," sniggered Gagool, as the light from the lamp fell upon it. "What did I tell you, that the white man dropped the woman's bag—behold it!"

Good stooped down and lifted it. It was heavy and jingled.

"By Jove! I believe it's full of diamonds," he said, in a whisper.

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"Go ahead," said Sir Henry impatiently. "Here, old lady, give me the lamp," and taking it from Gagool's hand, he stepped through the doorway and held it high above his head.

We pressed in after him, and found ourselves in Solomon's treasure chamber.

At first, all the lamp showed was a room cut out of the rock, and apparently not more than ten feet square. Next there came into sight, stored one on the other up to the roof, a heap of elephant-tusks. There could not have been less than four or five hundred, enough ivory to make a man wealthy for life.

On the opposite side of the room were about twenty wooden boxes, something like ammunition boxes, only rather larger, and painted red.

"There are the diamonds," cried I; "bring the light."

The lid of the top box appeared to have been smashed in, probably by Da Silvestra himself. Pushing my hand through the hole I drew it out full, not of diamonds, but of gold pieces.

"Well!" I said, replacing the coins, "there must be a couple of thousand pieces in each box."

"I don't see any diamonds," put in Good.

"Let my lords look yonder where it is darkest, if they would find the stones," said Gagool. "There my lords will find three stone chests, two sealed and one open."

"Look in that corner, Curtis," I said.

"Great heavens!" he cried, "see here."

We hurried up to where he was standing. Against the wall were placed three stone chests, each about two feet square. Two were fitted with stone lids; the lid of the third rested against the side of the chest, which was open.

"See!" he repeated hoarsely, holding the lamp over

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the open chest. We looked, and for a moment could make nothing out because we were dazzled. When our eyes grew used to it we saw that the chest was three-quarters full of uncut diamonds. Stooping, I picked some up. Yes, there was no doubt of it, there was the soapy feel about them.

I fairly gasped as I dropped them.

"We are the richest men in the whole world," I said.

"We shall flood the market with diamonds," said Good.

"Got to get them there first," suggested Sir Henry.

We stood still with pale faces and stared at each other, the lantern in the middle and the gems below. "Open the other chests, white men," croaked Gagool, "there are more therein. Take your fill, white lords. *Ha! ha!* take your fill."

At this, we set to work to pull up the stone lids on the other two, first breaking the seals that fastened them.

They were full too, full to the brim; at least, the second one was. As for the third chest, it was only about a quarter full, but the stones were all picked ones; some of them as large as pigeon-eggs, as we could see.

What we did *not* see, however, was old Gagool as she crept, crept like a snake, out of the treasure chamber and down the passage towards the door of solid rock.

* * * *

Suddenly cry upon cry came ringing up the vaulted path. It was Foulata's voice!

"*Oh, Bougwan! help! help! the stone falls!*"

"Leave go, girl! Then——"

"*Help! help! she has stabbed me!*"

By now we are running down the passage, and this is what the light from the lamp shows us. The door of rock

SOLOMON'S TREASURE CHAMBER

is closing down slowly; it is not three feet from the floor. Near it struggle Foulata and Gagool. The red blood of the brave girl runs to her knee, but still she holds the old witch, who fights like a wild cat. Ah! she is free! Foulata falls, and Gagool throws herself on the ground, to twist like a snake through the crack of the closing stone. She is under—ah! God! too late! too late!

The stone nips her, and she yells in agony. Down, down, it comes, all the thirty tons of it, slowly pressing her old body against the rock below. Shriek upon shriek, such as we never heard, and then the door was shut just as, rushing down the passage, we hurled ourselves against it.

It was all done in four seconds.

We turned to Foulata. The poor girl was stabbed in the body, and I saw that she could not live long.

"Ah! Bougwan, I die!" she gasped. "She crept out—Gagool; I did not see her, I was faint—and the door began to fall; then she came back, and was looking up the path—I saw her come in through the slowly falling door, and caught her and held her, and she stabbed me, and I *die*, Bougwan!"

"Poor girl! poor girl!" Good cried, and then, as he could do nothing else, rested her in his arms.

"Bougwan," she said, after a pause, "is Macumazahn also there? It grows so dark, I cannot see."

"Here I am, Foulata."

"Oh, Bougwan, hold me closer, I cannot feel thine arms—*oh! oh!*"

"She is dead—she is dead!" exclaimed Good, the tears running down his face.

"You need not let that trouble you, old fellow," said Sir Henry.

"Eh!" said Good; "what do you mean?"



THE DOOR OF ROCK IS CLOSING DOWN SLOWLY..."

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"I mean that you will soon be in a position to join her. *Man, don't you see that we are buried alive?*"

Now we understood. The vast mass of rock had closed, probably for ever. This was a door that none could hope to force, and we were the wrong side of it!

For a few minutes we stood horrified there over the corpse of Foulata. We saw it all now; that fiend Gagool had planned this for us from the first. It must have been just the joke that her evil mind would have rejoiced in, the idea of the three white men dying slowly of thirst and hunger among all that treasure.

"This will never do," said Sir Henry hoarsely; "the lamp will soon go out. Let us see if we can't find the spring that works the rock."

We sprang forward and began to feel up and down the door and the sides of the passage. But no knob or spring could we discover.

"It does not work from the inside," I said, "if it did Gagool would not have risked trying to crawl underneath the stone."

"Very well," said Sir Henry with a hard little laugh. "We can do nothing with the door; let us go back to the treasure room."

We turned and went. As we passed, I took up the basket of food which poor Foulata had carried and brought it with me. Then we returned and reverently bore in Foulata's corpse, laying it on the floor by the boxes of coin.

Next we seated ourselves, leaning our backs against the three stone chests.

"Let us divide the food," said Sir Henry, "so as to make it last as long as possible." Besides the biltong, or dried game-flesh, there were two gourds of water, each

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holding about a quart—enough to last us for a couple of days at most.

“Now,” said Sir Henry grimly, “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

We each ate a small portion of the biltong, and drank a sip of water. We had little appetite, but felt better after swallowing. Then we got up and examined the walls and floor of our prison-house, in the faint hope of finding some exit. There was none.

The lamp began to burn dim. The fat was nearly exhausted.

“Quatermain,” said Sir Henry, “what is the time—if your watch is going?”

I drew it out, and looked at it. It was six o'clock; we had entered the cave at eleven.

“Infadoos will miss us,” I suggested. “If we do not return tonight he will search for us in the morning, Curtis.”

“He may search in vain. He does not know the secret of the door nor even where it is. No living person knew it yesterday, except Gagool. Today no one knows it. Even if he found the door he could not break it down. All the Kukuana army could not break through five feet of living rock. My friends, I see nothing for it but to wait for our end.”

The lamp grew dimmer yet.

Presently it flared up and showed the whole scene, the great mass of white tusks, the boxes of gold, the body of poor Foulata, the goat-skin full of treasure, the dim glimmer of the diamonds, and the wild faces of the three white men awaiting death by starvation.

Then the flame sank and expired.

CHAPTER XVII

WE ABANDON HOPE

Hour by hour the long night wore on.

"Good," said Sir Henry's voice at last, and it sounded awful in the intense stillness, "how many matches have you in the box?"

"Six, Curtis."

"Strike one and let me see the time."

He did so, and in contrast to the dense darkness the flame nearly blinded us. It was five o'clock by my watch.

"We had better eat something and keep up our strength," I suggested.

"What is the good of eating?" answered Good; "the sooner we die and get it over the better."

"While there is life there is hope," said Sir Henry.

Accordingly we ate and sipped some water, and another period of time passed. Then Sir Henry suggested that it might be well to get as near the door as possible and shout, on the faint chance of somebody catching a sound outside. Good, who, from long practice at sea, has a fine piercing voice, groped his way down the passage and began. I never heard such yells as he made; but it might have been a mosquito buzzing for all the result they had.

After a while he gave it up and came back very thirsty, and had to have a drink. Then we stopped yelling, as it wasted our supply of water, and sat down once more to wait.

So somehow the day went as the night had gone, and when I lit a match to see the time it was seven o'clock.

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Once more we ate and drank, and as we did so an idea occurred to me.

"How is it," said I, "that the air in this place keeps fresh? It is thick and heavy, but it is perfectly fresh."

"Great heavens!" said Good, starting up, "I never thought of that. It can't come through the stone door, for it's air-tight, if ever a door was. It must come from somewhere. If there were no current of air in the place we should have been suffocated when we first came in. Let us have a look."

In a moment we were all three groping about on our hands and knees, feeling for any sign of a draught.

For an hour or more we went on feeling about, till at last Sir Henry and I gave up in despair. But Good still went on, saying that it was better than doing nothing.

"I say, you fellows," he said presently, "come over here."

We scrambled towards him in the darkness.

"Quatermain, put your hand where mine is. Now, do you feel anything?"

"I *think* I feel air coming up."

"Now listen." He rose and stamped upon the place. *It rang hollow.*

With trembling hands I lit a match (I had only four left). We saw that we were in the angle of the far corner of the chamber. As the match burnt we examined the spot. There was a join in the solid rock floor, and, great heavens! there, let in level with the rock, was a stone ring. We said nothing, we were too excited. Good had a knife, at the back of which was one of those hooks that are made to remove stones from horses' hoofs. He opened it, and scratched round the ring with it. Finally he worked it under, and levered away gently for fear of

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breaking the hook. The ring began to move. Being stone it had not got set fast as it would have done if it had been iron. Presently it was upright. Then he thrust his hands into it and tugged with all his force, but nothing budged.

"Let me try," I said impatiently, for the position of the stone, right in the angle of the corner, made it impossible for two to pull at once. I took hold and strained away, but no results.

Then Sir Henry tried and failed.

Taking the hook again, Good scratched all round the crack where we felt the air coming up.

"Now, Curtis," he said, "you try again, and put your back into it; you are as strong as two. Stop," and he took out his handkerchief and ran it through the ring. "Quatermain, get Curtis round the middle and pull for dear life when I give the word. *Now!*"

Sir Henry put out all his strength, and Good and I did the same.

"Heave! heave! it's giving," gasped Sir Henry; and I heard the muscles of his great back cracking. Suddenly there was a grating sound, then a rush of air, and we were all on our backs on the floor with a heavy flagstone upon the top of us.

"Light a match, Quatermain," said Sir Henry, as soon as we had picked ourselves up and got our breath; "carefully, now."

I did so, and there before us was the *first step of a stone stair*.

"Now what is to be done?" asked Good.

"Follow the stair, of course, and trust to Providence."

"Wait!" said Sir Henry. "Quatermain, get the bit of biltong and the water that are left; we may want them."

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I crept back to our place by the chests to do this, and as I was coming away an idea struck me. We had not thought much about the diamonds for the last twenty-four hours or so, but I felt I might as well pocket a few in case we ever got out safely. So I just put my fist into the first chest and filled the pockets of my old shooting-coat, topping up with a couple of handfuls of big ones out of the third chest.

"I say, you fellows," I called out, "won't you take some diamonds with you? I've filled my pockets."

"Oh! hang the diamonds!" said Good. "I hope I never see another one."

"Come on, Quatermain," said Sir Henry, whom I found already standing on the first step of the stone stair. "Steady, I will go first."

"Mind where you put your feet, there may be some awful hole underneath," I answered.

"Much more likely to be another room," said Sir Henry, while he descended slowly, counting the steps as he went.

When he got to "fifteen" he stopped. "Here's the bottom," he said. "Thank goodness! I think it's a passage. Come on down."

Good went next, and I followed last, and on reaching the bottom lit one of the two remaining matches. By its light we could just see that we were standing in a narrow tunnel, which ran to right and left. Before we could see any more, the match burnt my fingers and went out. The question was which way to go. We were at our wits' end, till suddenly it struck Good that when I had lit the match the draught of the passage blew the flame to the left.

"Let us go against the draught," he said; "air draws inwards, not outwards."

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So we turned right, feeling along the wall with our hands and trying the ground before us at every step.

When we had groped our way for about a quarter of an hour along the passage, suddenly it was crossed by a second passage. We followed this, only to be led in time into a third. And so it went on for some hours. We seemed to be in a stone maze which led nowhere.

At last we halted, thoroughly worn out, and ate up our remaining piece of biltong and drank the last drop of water, for our throats were like furnaces. It seemed to us that we had escaped death in the darkness of the chamber only to meet it in the darkness of the tunnels. As we stood there, I thought that I caught a sound. It was very faint and very far off, but it *was* a sound, a faint, murmuring sound. The others heard it too.

"By heaven! it's running water," said Good. "Come on."

Off we started again, groping our way along the rocky wall. As we went the sound became more and more audible, till at last it seemed quite loud. On, yet on; now we could distinctly make out the swirl of rushing water. And yet how could there be running water so deep in the earth? Now we were quite near to it, and Good, who was leading, swore that he could smell it.

"Go gently, Good," said Sir Henry, "we must be close." *Splash!* and a cry from Good.

He had fallen in.

"Good! Good! where are you?" we shouted. To our relief an answer came back in a choking voice.

"All right; I've got hold of a rock. Strike a light to show me where you are."

Hastily I lit the last match. We saw a dark mass of water running at our feet. How wide it was we could

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not see, but there, some way out, was our companion hanging on to the rock.

"Stand clear to catch me," sung out Good. "I must swim for it."

Then we heard a splash, and a great struggle. Another minute and he had grabbed at and caught Sir Henry's hand, and we had pulled him up into the tunnel.

"My word!" he said, between his gasps, "that was touch and go. If I hadn't caught that rock, and known how to swim, I should have been done for. It runs like a mill-race, and I couldn't feel the bottom."

We dared not follow the banks of the river for fear of falling into it again in the darkness. So after Good had rested a while, and we had drunk our fill of the water, which was sweet and fresh, and washed our faces, we began to retrace our steps along the tunnel. At length we came to another gallery leading to our right.

"We may as well take it," said Sir Henry wearily; "all roads are the same here; we can only go on till we drop."

Slowly, for a long, long while, we stumbled, utterly exhausted, along this new tunnel, Sir Henry now leading the way.

Suddenly he stopped, and we bumped up against him.

"Look!" he whispered, "am I going mad, or is that light?"

We stared with all our eyes, and there, yes, there, far ahead of us, was a faint, glimmering spot. With a gasp of hope we pushed on. In five minutes there was no longer any doubt; it *was* a patch of faint light. A minute more and a breath of real live air was fanning us. On we struggled. All at once the tunnel narrowed.

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Sir Henry went on his knees. Smaller and smaller it grew, till it was only the size of a large fox's earth—it was *earth* now, mind you; the rock had ceased.

A squeeze, a struggle, and Sir Henry was out, and so was 'Good, and so was I, and there above us were the blessed stars, and in our lungs was the sweet air. Then suddenly something gave, and we were all rolling over and over and over through grass and bushes and soft wet soil.

I caught at something and stopped. Sitting up I gave a shout. An answering shout came from Sir Henry just below. I scrambled to him, and found him unhurt, though breathless. Then we looked for Good. A little way off we discovered him also, jammed in a forked root. He was a good deal knocked about, but soon came to himself.

We sat down together there on the grass, and really, I think we cried for joy. We had escaped from that awful dungeon, which was so near to becoming our grave.

Presently the grey light stole down the slopes, and we saw that we were at the bottom, or rather, nearly at the bottom, of the vast pit in front of the entrance to the cave. Now we could make out the dim forms of the three colossal statues. Doubtless those passages, along which we had wandered, had been originally in some way connected with the great diamond mine. As for the river in the bowels of the mountain, Heaven only knows what it is, or where it goes. I, for one, have no wish to trace its course.

Lighter and lighter it grew. We could see each other now—hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed wretches, smeared all over with dust and mud, bruised and bleeding. And yet it is a fact that Good's eye-glass was still fixed in

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Good's eye. I doubt whether he had ever taken it out at all. Neither the darkness, nor the plunge in the river, nor the roll down the slope, had been able to separate Good from his eye-glass.

Presently we rose and began slowly and painfully to struggle up the sloping side of the great pit. For an hour or more we climbed, dragging ourselves on by the help of roots and grasses.

At last it was done, and we stood by the great road.

At the side of the road, a hundred yards off, a fire was burning in front of some huts, and round the fire were figures. We staggered towards them, halting every few paces. Presently one of the figures rose, saw us, and fell on to the ground, crying out for fear.

"Infadoos, Infadoos! It is we, thy friends."

He rose; he ran to us, staring wildly, and still shaking with fear.

"Oh, my lords, my lords, it is indeed you come back from the dead!—come back from the dead!"

And the old warrior flung himself down before us and, clasping Sir Henry's knees, wept aloud for joy.

CHAPTER XVIII

IGNOSI'S FAREWELL

It was not till ten days later that we found ourselves once more in our old quarters at Loo. Strange to say, we were little the worse for our terrible experience, except that my stubbly hair came out about three shades greyer than when we started.

I need hardly tell you that we never again got into Solomon's treasure chamber. After two days spent in recovering, we had climbed into the great pit in the hope of finding the hole by which we had crept out of the mountain, but with no success. To begin with, rain had fallen, and what is more, the sides of the pit were full of ant-bear and other holes. We had also made a further visit to the stalactite cave, and gone once more into the Chamber of the Dead. We gazed at the mass of rock, thinking of the priceless treasures beyond. I say gazed at the "rock", for we could find no traces of the join of the sliding door; nor could we hit upon the secret that worked it, though we tried for an hour or more.

At last we gave up in disgust. Only dynamite could force its way through five feet of solid rock. And so we left it. Perhaps, in years to come, some explorer may hit upon the secret and flood the world with gems. But, myself, I doubt it.

On arriving at Loo we were welcomed most warmly by Ignosi. He listened with interest to our wonderful story; but when we told him of old Gagool's frightful end he grew thoughtful.

KING SOLOMON'S MINES

"Come hither," he called out to a very old *induna* or councillor, who was sitting with others in a circle round the king, but out of earshot. The ancient man rose, approached and saluted.

"Thou art aged," said Ignosi.

"Ay, my lord and king! Thy father's father and I were born on the same day."

"Tell me, when thou wast little, didst thou know Gagool the witch doctress?"

"Ay, my lord and king!"

"How was she then—young, like thee?"

"Not so, my lord the king! She was even as she is now and as she was in the days of my grandfather before me; old and dried, very ugly, and full of wickedness."

"She is no more; she is dead."

"It is well, O king! it is well."

"Go thou and tell thy brothers in the council. And," turning to us again, "continue with the tale; surely there never was its like!"

After I had come to the end of the story of our escape, I spoke to Ignosi about our departure from Kukuana-land.

"Now, Ignosi," I said, "the time has come for us to bid thee farewell, and start to see our own land once more. Behold, Ignosi, thou camest with us a servant, and now we leave thee a mighty king. If thou art grateful to us, remember to do as thou didst promise: to rule justly, to respect the law, and to put none to death without a cause. So shalt thou prosper. Tomorrow, at the break of day, Ignosi, thou wilt give us an escort to lead us across the mountains. Is it not so, O king?"

Ignosi covered his face with his hands for a while before answering.

"My heart is sore," he said at last. "What have I

IGNOSI'S FAREWELL

done to you, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, that ye should leave me desolate? Ye who stood by me in rebellion and in battle, will ye leave me in the day of peace and victory?"

I laid my hand upon his arm. "Ignosi," I said, "tell us, when thou didst wander in Zululand, and among the white people in Natal, did not thine heart turn to the land thy mother told thee of, thy native land?"

"It was even so, Macumazahn."

"In like manner, Ignosi, do our hearts turn to our land and to our own place."

Then came a silence. When Ignosi broke it, it was in a different voice.

"I do perceive that now as ever thy words are wise, Macumazahn. Well, ye must go, and leave my heart sore.

"But listen, and let all the white men know my words. No other white man shall cross the mountains. I will see no traders with their guns and rum. My people shall fight with the spear, and drink water, like their fathers before them. If a white man comes to my gates I will send him back; if a hundred come I will push them back; if armies come, I will make war on them with all my strength. But for you three, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, the path is always open; for behold ye are dearer to me than ought that breathes.

"And now, since ye would go, Infadoos, my uncle, shall take you by the hand and guide you with a regiment. There is, as I have learned, another way across the mountains that he shall show you. Farewell, my brothers, brave white men.

"At times as ye look back down the path of life, or when ye are old and gather yourselves together to crouch before the fire, because for you the sun has no more heat, ye will think of how we stood shoulder to

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shoulder in that great battle which thy wise words planned, Macumazahn; of how thou wast the point of the horn that galled Twala's flank, Bougwan; whilst thou stoodst in the ring of the Greys, Incubu, and men went down before thine axe like corn before a sickle; ay, and of how thou didst break that wild bull Twala's strength, and bring his pride to dust. Fare ye well for ever, Incubu, Macumazahn, and Bougwan, my lords and my friends."

Ignosi rose and looked earnestly at us for a few seconds. Then he threw the corner of his karross over his head, so as to cover his face from us.

We went in silence.

Next day at dawn we left Loo, escorted by our old friend Infadoos and by the regiment of Buffaloes.

As we travelled, he told us that there was another pass over the mountains to the north of the one followed by Solomon's Great Road. About two years previously, a party of Kukuana hunters had descended this path into the desert in search of ostriches. In the course of their hunt they had been led far from the mountains and were much troubled by thirst. Seeing trees on the horizon, however, they walked towards them, and discovered a large and fertile oasis. It was by way of this oasis that Infadoos suggested that we should return. Also some of the hunters were there to guide us to the oasis from which they said they had seen other fertile spots far away in the desert.¹

¹ It had often puzzled us to understand how Ignosi's mother could have survived the journey across the mountains and desert. She must have taken this second route, and wandered out into the wilderness. If she did so, she may well have been picked up by some ostrich hunters and led to the oasis, and so travelled by degrees south to Zululand.—A.Q.

IGNOSI'S FAREWELL

On the night of the fourth day's journey we found ourselves once more on the crest of the mountains that separate Kukuanaland from the desert. Then, at dawn on the following day, we were led to the edge of a very steep gully, by which we were to descend to the plain two thousand feet below.

Here we said farewell to that true friend and warrior, Infadoos. We were very sorry to part from him; indeed, Good actually gave him as a souvenir a spare *eye-glass*. Infadoos was delighted, and after several attempts succeeded in screwing it into his own eye. I never saw anything more strange than the old warrior looked with an eye-glass. Eye-glasses do not go well with leopard-skin cloaks and black ostrich plumes.

Then, after a thundering farewell salute from the Buffaloes, we shook Infadoos by the hand, and began our downward climb. A very tough business it proved to be, but somehow that evening we found ourselves at the bottom without accident.

Next morning we started on a weary trudge across the desert, having with us a good supply of water carried by our five guides, and camped that night in the open, marching again at dawn.

On the third day we could see the trees of the oasis, and within an hour of sundown we were walking once more upon grass and listening to the sound of running water.

CHAPTER XIX

FOUND!

AND now I come to perhaps the strangest adventure that happened to us in all this strange business. I was walking along quietly, some way in front of the other two, down the banks of the stream which runs from the oasis till it is swallowed up in the desert sands. Suddenly I stopped and rubbed my eyes. There, not twenty yards in front of me, under the shade of a tree, and facing the stream, was a cosy hut, built of grass and withes, but having a full-length door instead of an entry-hole.

“What the dickens,” said I to myself, “can a hut be doing here?” As I said it, the door of the hut opened, and there limped out of it a *white man*. He was clothed in skins, and had an enormous black beard. I thought that I must have got a touch of the sun. It was impossible. No hunter ever came to such a place as this. Certainly no hunter would ever settle in it. I stared and stared, and so did the other man, and just at that moment Sir Henry and Good walked up.

“Look here, you fellows,” I said, “is that a white man, or am I mad?”

Sir Henry looked, and Good looked, and then all of a sudden the lame white man uttered a great cry, and began hobbling towards us. When he was close, he fell down in a sort of faint.

With a leap Sir Henry was by his side.

“Great Scott!” he cried, “*it is my brother George!*”

At the sound of his voice, another figure, also clothed

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in skins, came from the hut, a gun in his hand, and ran towards us. On seeing me he too gave a cry.

"Macumazahn," he halloed, "don't you know me, Baas? I'm Jim the hunter. I lost the note you gave me for the Baas, and we have been here nearly two years. And the fellow fell at my feet, weeping for joy."

Meanwhile the man with the black beard had recovered and he and Sir Henry were shaking hands violently, apparently without a word to say.

"My dear fellow," burst out Sir Henry at last, "I thought that you were dead. I have been over Solomon's Mountains to find you, and now I come across you perched in the desert, like an old vulture!"

"I tried to go over Solomon's Mountains nearly two years ago," was the answer, "but when I got here a boulder fell on my leg and crushed it, and I haven't been able to go forward or back."

Then I came up. "How do you do, Mr. Neville?" I said; "do you remember me?"

"Why," he said, "isn't it Quatermain, eh, and Good, too? Hold on a minute, you fellows, I am getting dizzy again. It is all so very strange."

That evening, over the camp fire, George Curtis told us his story. A little less than two years before, he had started from Sitanda's Kraal, to try to reach Suliman's Berg. On the advice of the natives, he headed for the descent down which we had just come, which is clearly a better route than that marked out in old Dom Silvestra's plan. In the desert he and Jim finally reached this oasis. On the day of their arrival he was sitting by the stream, and Jim was taking the honey from a bees' nest on the top of a bank immediately above him. In doing this he loosened a great boulder of rock, which fell upon George Curtis's right leg, crushing it frightfully.

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He had been so lame that he found it impossible to travel any distance.

As for food, however, they got on pretty well. They had a good supply of ammunition, and the oasis held large quantities of game, which came there for water. These they shot or trapped, using the flesh for food, and, after their clothes wore out, the hides for clothing.

"And so," George Curtis ended, "we have lived for nearly two years, like Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday. We hoped that some natives might come here to help us away, but none have come. And now *you* of all people in the world, *you*, who I fancied had long ago forgotten all about me, turn up and find me where you least expected. It is the most wonderful thing that I ever heard of."

Then Sir Henry set to work and told him our adventures, sitting late into the night to do it.

"By Jove!" he said, when I showed him some of the diamonds: "well, at least you have got something for your pains."

Sir Henry laughed. "They belong to Quatermain and Good. It was a part of the bargain that they should divide any spoils there might be."

This remark set me thinking. Having spoken to Good, I told Sir Henry that it was our wish that his share of the diamonds be handed to his brother, who had suffered even more than ourselves. Finally he agreed to this, but George Curtis did not know of it until some time afterwards.

* * * *

And here I think I shall end my history. Our journey across the desert back to Sitanda's Kraal was heavy going, especially as we had to support George Curtis,

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whose right leg was very weak indeed. But we managed it somehow.

At Sit'anda's we found our guns and other goods quite safe, though the old scoundrel in charge was disgusted at our surviving to claim them. Six months later, we were all once more safe and sound at my little place on the Berea, near Durban, where I am now writing.

P.S.—Just as I had written the last word, a Kafir came up my avenue of orange trees, carrying a letter in a cleft stick. It turned out to be from Sir Henry, and as it speaks for itself I give it in full.

"October 1st, 1884

"Brayley Hall, Yorkshire

"My dear Quatermain,

"I sent you a line a few mails back to say that the three of us, George, Good, and myself, fetched up all right in England. We got off the boat at Southampton, and went up to town. You should have seen what a swell Good turned out the very next day, beautifully shaved, frock coat fitting like a glove, brand new eye-glass, etc. etc.

"To come to business, Good and I took the diamonds to Streeter's, and really I am afraid to tell you their value, it seems so enormous. I asked them if they would buy them, but they recommended us to sell by degrees, for fear we should flood the market. They offer, however, a hundred and eighty thousand for a small portion of them.

"I want you to come home, my dear old comrade, and to buy a house near here. You have done your day's work, and have lots of money now. There is a place for sale quite close which would suit you. Do come; the sooner the better; you can finish writing the story of our adventures on board ship.

"If you start on receipt of this you will reach here by Christmas, and I book you to stay with me for that. Good is coming and George; and so, by the way, is your boy Harry (there's a bribe for you). I have had him down for a week's shooting, and like him. He is a cool young hand; he shot me in the leg, cut out the pellets, and then remarked

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upon the advantages of having a medical student with every shooting party.

"Good-bye, old boy; I can't say any more, but I know that you will come.

"Your sincere friend,

"HENRY CURTIS

"P.S. The pair of buffalo horns you gave me have now been put up in the hall here and look magnificent; and the axe with which I chopped off Twala's head is fixed above my writing-table. I wish that we could have managed to bring away the coats of chain armour.

"H. C."

Today is Tuesday. There is a steamer going on Friday, and I really think that I must take Curtis at his word, and sail by her for England, if it is only to see you, Harry, my boy, and to look after the printing of this history, which is a task that I do not like to trust to anybody else.

ALLAN QUATERMAIN

